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**TARGETING CIVILIANS WITH INDISCRIMINATE
VIOLENCE**

by

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March 2008

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Terrorist violence against innocent people in Iraq continues despite the determination of Coalition and Iraqi forces to stop it. This thesis examines the relationship between a terrorist organization's strategy of using indiscriminate violence to attack the civilian population and its operational success. Specifically, the tactic to be examined is that of the al Qaeda in Iraq, which has attacked civilians with indiscriminate violence (in the context of the insurgency) since the formal termination of hostilities in Iraq in May 2003. Using the historical example of the insurgency in Algeria in 1992-1999, this thesis hopes to find the answer as to whether, and under what conditions terrorist tactics of attacking civilians with indiscriminate use of violence applied by Iraqi Islamist insurgents may be effective in reaching their political aims. Also, this thesis will question whether manipulation of violence can turn the population against the protagonists, rather than mobilizing it in favor of one of them. The thesis will answer the question of why Islamist insurgents from al Qaeda in Iraq kill civilians in unjustifiable ways: slaughtering, decapitating, bombing and shooting hundreds of men, women and children.

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TARGETING CIVILIANS WITH INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AIS - Islamic Salvation Army

AQI - Al Qaeda in Iraq

FIS - Islamic Salvation Front

FLN - National Liberation Front

GIA - Armed Islamic Group

MIA - Islamic Armed Movement

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I. INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW, AND THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

A. BACKGROUND AND THESIS QUESTION

Al Qaeda branch in Iraq (AQI) is generally regarded as one of the most deadly terrorist groups of modern times, and its innovative and sophisticated tactics provides a model for Islamist groups through Asia, North Africa and Europe. Al Qaeda's mass casualty suicide bombers, put into action in Iraq, repeatedly demonstrate their willingness to kill indiscriminately large numbers of noncombatants.

Drawing from the historical example of the Islamist insurgency in Algeria in 1992-1999, the goal of this thesis to find the answer as to whether, and under what conditions, indiscriminate terrorist attacks against civilians by al Qaeda in Iraq may be effective in reaching their political aims; or, if this manipulation of violence can turn the population against them, rather than mobilizing it in their favor. The thesis will answer the question of why Islamist insurgents from al Qaeda in Iraq kill civilians in unjustifiable ways: slaughtering, decapitating, bombing and shooting hundreds of men, women and children.

Algeria and Iraq were selected because they are the most important examples of indiscriminate, high level violence against civilians perpetrated by Islamist extremist groups. In both examples the fatality rate is extremely high. More importantly, both countries are interesting threshold cases for examining the level at which violence begins to have a visible impact.

B. THESIS OVERVIEW

The radical jihadists have become key players in the insurgency against the United States occupation in Iraq. These are the most dangerous groups that use brutal and ruthless tactics to achieve their utopian goals. Violence and massacres of noncombatant are not necessarily unique to the Islamist extremists in Algeria and Iraq. This thesis argues that intentional killing of noncombatants by radical Islamist terrorist groups in

times of war is often part of a deliberate military strategy designed to combat regime forces or other rivals in an insurgency and to shape civilian behavior.

Unlike conventional military forces, insurgencies often rely directly on local civilian populations for food, shelter, supplies, and intelligence, as well as the cover of safe havens into which insurgents can disappear to avoid detection. Why then would insurgent groups choose to carry out such actions, knowing that civilian support is a precondition for their very existence? Is there any logic behind these acts of violence? What are the causes of the intentional killings of large numbers of civilians in the war in Iraq? Which variables can help make sense of indiscriminate violence?

The thesis will focus on the reasons why terrorist groups target civilians.. Finding it difficult to beat U.S. and Iraqi government forces in open fighting, AQI insurgents target civilians in order to impose extra costs on the coalition and Iraqi authorities. Their methods seem to be effective on operational and tactical levels, however in the long run they may fail.

When comparing historical examples of terrorism and insurgencies in the twentieth century, it can be noted that by attacking civilians, al Qaeda in Iraq tries to divide the country along sectarian and ethnic borders and undermine international efforts to bring peace and stability into the region. Provoking large scale civil war and undermining the Iraqi political process may not bring victory to the insurgents, but it can deny it to the Iraqi government and the United States.

1. Methodology

Case study analysis is the methodology used in this study. This thesis will present a set of theoretical hypotheses and qualitative data from the civil war in Algeria in 1992-1999, and test existing theories against new empirical evidence from the ongoing insurgency in Iraq. A rational choice model will be used to search an issue typically outlined and understood as irrational: an indiscriminate, large volume of violence against

civilians in the context of insurgency and terrorist's activities in the war in Iraq.¹ More specifically, this thesis will focus on indiscriminative violence, mass murders and massacres of civilians in Iraq and try to find the logic that drives such actions and discuss their consequences. The consequences of these acts are of vital importance for the process of implementing a successful counterinsurgency strategy.

This thesis begins by examining how and when violence is observed.² Next, it discusses specific types of violence: purposive, massive, indiscriminate violence against civilians and finds out the logic that drives Islamist insurgent and terrorist groups to carry out such actions, knowing that they may be counterproductive.

Chapter II will analyze why the expanding use of violence by the GIA in Algeria produced a surprising outcome: violence alienated the group from the population, which led to greater defection to the regime and almost total demise of jihadists.

Chapter III will examine the current status of the AQI Islamist jihadists in Iraq and try to find the answer as to why the Sunni turned against their former allies.

When comparing the cases in Algeria and in Iraq, a pattern of independent and dependent variables emerge that form a possible model that policymakers could exploit: strategic miscalculations that insurgents and terrorists make by attacking civilians. Case comparison shows that the nature of violence and its indiscriminate quality are independent variables causing or facing dependent variables of defection to regime or turning against terrorists.

This paper is a study of the consequences of purposive, indiscriminate, large scale violence against civilians in a selected group of countries that experienced Islamist terrorism.³ A social movement theory approach will be used to analyze civilian

¹ A rational choice model explains group behavior mainly as a product of deliberate logical choices made by key individuals.

² Violence is an action that deliberately or unintentionally disorients the behavior of others. In: Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, California, 1982), 12.

³ Terrorism is defined as “the strategic use of violence and threats of violence by an oppositional political group against civilians or non combatants, and is usually intended to influence several audiences.” In: Jeff Goodwin, “A Theory of Categorical Terrorism” *Social Forces*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (June 2006): 2029.

“awaking” - defection to a regime in response to the insurgent’s violence by way of creating counterinsurgents, local and tribal militias and political movements.⁴

This thesis focuses on the main argument that indiscriminate violence against civilians is not only an example of irrational, random violence motivated by extremist Islamist ideology (as typically described in the media) but it can also be understood as part of a rational strategy, initiated by the Al Qaeda in Iraq, aiming to maximize civilian support under a particular set of restraints. The thesis will compare this argument with the available evidence: address problems, such as the identity of the victims and the behavior of the groups affiliated to al Qaeda; and extend the argument to similar violence in the Algerian Civil War. It will also draw a number of implications from these findings and discuss a research agenda.

Finally, the thesis will analyze the determinants of the tactics, strategies, and behaviors that Islamist insurgent groups employ in their relationships with a civilian population. The data will be analyzed according to a simple theoretical framework in which violence is the outcome of insurgent or terrorist organizations pursuing certain goals under certain constraints. Applicable information about all those fatalities will be used codified according to two variables: (1) the degree of indiscriminate violence of the attack, and (2) the strategic aim behind the killing.

Within the conclusion of the thesis, policy options analysis will be used to evaluate alternatives the United States may have in response to these acts of indiscriminate violence and ways to eliminate Islamist terrorists from the political process in Iraq.

2. Major Questions and Arguments

This thesis addresses three main questions:

- (1) What is the relation between a terrorist organization’s strategy and its operational success?

⁴ Social movement theory provides a framework for informal groups’ growth, development and action focused on specific political or social issues. Civilian activism, both in Algerian and Iraqi case, is a response to the psychological distress produced by acts of insurgent’s violence.

(2) How effective can terrorist strategy be when using indiscriminative violence in achieving political aims?

(3) Is there any successful negotiating strategy this violence can produce?

The answers to these questions require a detailed analysis that combines motivations and effects at the individual level with constraints and opportunities at the collective level.

3. Survey of Prior Work on the Question of Violence

Previous literature offers many studies conducted with the purpose explaining government violence against noncombatants in war. There are also a few explanations to the question of why insurgents, rebels, armed militias and terrorist organizations kill civilians with indiscriminate violence. The recent literature on civil wars suffers from poorly specified and empirically untested causal mechanisms of violence against noncombatants perpetrated by insurgent and terrorist groups.

Several theories present explanations for why insurgent organizations implement the tactic of indiscriminate violence against civilians that is terroristic in nature. The first explanation relates to the fact that “although insurgents have to rely on the popular support, this support is not always offered voluntarily.” As an alternative, insurgents need to impose fear throughout the civilian population by terror in order to gain such obedience. The second explanation reveals that insurgents may openly and deliberately target civilians as a strategy of war, “in order to break down the morale of the enemy or raise the cost for continued fighting.” Different characteristics of the internal structures of rebel groups are offered as a third explanation.⁵

⁵ Lisa Hultman, “Killing Civilians to Signal Resolve: Rebel Strategies in Intrastate Conflicts,” (Paper presented at the Jan Tinbergen Peace Science Conference, 27-29 June 2005), 2.

4. Major Debates and Approaches to the Issue

a. Rational Explanation

In contrast to the popular prevailing views that violence is an example of deadly madness, many scholars argue that there is logic to it and that it has much less to do with collective emotions, ideologies, and cultures than many people currently believe. Christopher Cramer believes that “Violence makes sense to different people in different ways in varied context; and it makes different kinds of sense to one person or group at the same time, that is, different rationales and meanings are not necessarily exclusive.”⁶ The terrorists’ violence, or “performance violence,” is designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect. The symbolic significance of such acts is comprehensive; they have different meanings to different observers. Mark Juergensmeyer agrees with Martha Crenshaw that “acts of terrorism are usually the products of an internal logic that drives a group into perpetrating terrorist acts, and not of random or crazy thinking.” He hesitates, however, to use the term “strategy” for all rationale justifications for terrorist actions.⁷

Stathis Kalyvas believes that “violence is never a simple reflection of the optimal strategy of its users;” and “it has extremely interactive character.” He argues that “violence can be used to exterminate a group or to control it.” When violence is primarily used to control population (coercive violence) it “becomes a resource rather than the final product.” As a result, “coercive violence may be strategic and tactical at the same time.”⁸ Kalyvas explains that enormous violence in civil wars is run by the logic of terrorism: violence tends to be used by political actors against civilians in order to control them and

⁶ Christopher Cramer, *Violence in Developing Countries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 284.

⁷ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California, 2003), 123.

⁸ Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26-27.

shape their political behavior. “This is often called ‘terror.’”⁹ Terrorist and insurgent groups target civilians because they want to force the regime into concessions or relaxation of coercive control by “spreading insecurity - at the extreme and making the country ungovernable.”¹⁰ Islamist extremists are not only “fanatics engaged in irrational, deviant, unpredictable violence.” Indiscriminate violence is one of many possibilities in their repertoires of contention and represents rational calculus about tactical efficiency to “facilitate objectives or protect their organizational and political gains.”¹¹ Indiscriminate violence emerges for the reason that it is much cheaper than selective violence - its main alternative. Therefore so far, al Zarqawi started in Iraq as “the campaign of suicide and car bombings that mainly affects Iraqi civilians, predominantly Shi’ites” and later Sunnis who turned against al Qaeda.¹²

The study on the Algerian Civil War provides an opportunity for investigating the mechanisms of a fact traditionally regarded as irrational: large-scales indiscriminate acts of violence in a civil war. Kalyvas argues that reckless massacres perpetrated by Armed Islamic Group (GIA) Islamist insurgents can be understood “as part of a rational strategy aiming to punish and deter civilian defection under specific constraints.” These acts of violence were not driven by a radical ideology that justifies the extermination of some categories of people or by senseless will to kill people, as many scholars believed. He finds out that much of the massacres were highly strategic and carefully calculated. Acts of ridiculous violence are “likely to be committed by insurgents in the context of a particular strategic conjuncture characterized by (a)

⁹ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “The Logic of Violence in Civil War” (Paper presented at LiCEP, Duke University, April 2000), 3.

¹⁰ Marta Crenshaw, “The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice” in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reich, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 18.

¹¹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 62.

¹² Loretta Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq: Al Zarqawi and the New Generation* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 186.

fragmented and unstable rule over the civilian population, (b) mass civilian defections toward incumbents and (c) escalation of violence.”¹³

Mohammed Hafez reveals that the use of violence by the GIA in Algeria was a tactical response to shifting opportunity structures and emerged under particular conditions and circumstances. During the 1990s, the GIA perpetrated a great number of brutal civilian massacres. Hafez argues that such killings of civilians are more likely to occur where the political opportunity structure is characterized by repression, exclusive organization and anti-system ideologies. The GIA in Algeria illustrates the “dynamics of radicalization.” The expanding violence against civilians, however, produced surprising outcomes: it “led to greater defection to the regime.”¹⁴ The GIA atrocities turned popular support dramatically against the Islamic movement. Quintan Wiktorowicz speculates that “Unable to limit the scale of the violence and save the image of jihad, the pragmatists [in Islamic Salvation Front] recognized that they could no longer reach their objective of political inclusion through the use of violence.”¹⁵

The most important determinants of civilian abuse are internal to the structure of the faction. Like many insurgents’ movements, the GIA was, and al Qaeda in Iraq is, still a combination of various factions with no centralized, authoritative leadership. Humphreys and Einstein offer another explanation of indiscriminate violence with significant variations existing in “the extent to which warring groups abuse civilians: across conflicts, across groups, and within countries geographically and over time.” The authors describe the simple logic of extraction, which is used to generate hypotheses about variation in levels of abuse across fighting units. High levels of abuse are exhibited by warring factions that are unable to control the behavior of their members because they

¹³ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1999): 244-245.

¹⁴ Mohammed M. Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres: A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 53.

¹⁵ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” *Arab Studies Quarterly*, (Summer 2001): 8.

are more ethnically fragmented, rely on material incentives to recruit participants, and lack mechanisms for punishing lack of discipline.¹⁶

Weinstein's theory of organizational structure focuses directly on the processes throughout terrorist or insurgent groups that produce violence. Indiscriminate violence emerges as a strategy in different contexts and to different degrees as a consequence of the interaction between rebels and governments fighting for control of the state on the one hand and civilians who choose to offer or withhold support from the competing parties on the other hand. The author argues that characteristics of the environment in which rebellions emerge constrain rebel organizations and shape the patterns of violence that civilians experience. The level and character of violence vary across rebel groups. Those groups that are constructed around economic endowments are likely to produce much higher levels of indiscriminate violence than those rooted in social endowments.¹⁷

Indiscriminate violence against noncombatants is also related to the insurgents' performance on the battlefield. Lisa Hultman examines the theory that "rebel groups who are losing battles target civilians in order to impose extra costs on the government. When rebels attack civilians, the government may incur both political and military costs. Violence against civilians is thus used as an alternative conflict strategy aimed at pressuring the government into concessions." Hultman argues that "when rebels perform poorly on the battlefield, by losing fighters and failing to defeat government troops, they are likely to kill more civilians." They may choose to act this way in order to signal their determination.¹⁸ Hultman believes that when insurgents lose battles "they need to signal to the government that they are resolute actors," if they want to keep their bargaining position. The purpose of killing civilians is that it functions as a signal, and because it is a costly action that requires "little military capacity it is likely to be chosen

¹⁶ Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (August 2006): 429.

¹⁷ Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199-210.

¹⁸ Lisa Hultman, "Battle Losses and Rebel Violence: Rising the Costs for Fighting" *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 19 (2007): 205-206.

by the insurgents groups.”¹⁹ The al Qaeda’s terrorists shifted their main effort to Iraqi civilian targets because they were more vulnerable and had far more political impact.²⁰

Lisa Hultman suggests that “ethnic wars, in general, are more likely to involve indiscriminate mass killings than conflicts waged primarily over political or economic issues.”²¹ Al Qaeda in Iraq has consistently targeted co-ethnic Shi’ites whom it has accused of collaboration with the American forces. Abu Mosab al Zarqawi, former leader of al Qaeda in Iraq launched a series of attacks on the Shiite leadership, holy Shi’ite sites, and Shi’ite men and women on the street. Bruce Riedel reveals that Al Zarqawi’s actions were part of a considered strategy planned before the invasion. Targeting Shi’ites isolated and exposed U.S. forces to attack. Zarqawi wanted “the arena to be cleared of any rival before the American army withdraws from Iraq so the Mujahideens would gain mastery over Iraq, set up Sharia courts, suppress heresy and all the things that are repudiated by Islam.”²² Anthony Cordesman suggests that “Iraq has shown all too clearly, that the long history of sectarian violence and tribal wars has not been erased from the minds of much of the Middle East.”²³

Post, Ruby and Shaw believe that “certain regions in the world have long accepted violence as a quasi-legitimate means of expressing dissatisfaction; resolving political, economic, and social disputes; and wresting political control from the opposing group” (e.g., in Algeria and Iraq). The authors state that “in these regions, violence is an expected feature of the political order.” They argue that “groups seeking to affect political change under such circumstances are more likely to perceive violence as the necessary means for implementing their agenda. These regions are historically prone to

¹⁹ Lisa Hultman, “Killing Civilians to Signal Resolve: Rebel Strategies in Intrastate Conflicts” (Paper presented at the Jan Tinbergen Peace Science Conference, 27-29 June 2005), 22.

²⁰ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency: The Nature of Attacks and Patterns and Cycles in the Conflict,” (Center for Strategic and International Studies, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, 3 February, 2006), ii.

²¹ Benjamin Valentino, Paul Huth, and Dylan Balch-Linsday, “Draining the Sea: Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare,” *International Organization*, Vol.54 (Spring 2004): 382.

²² Bruce Riedel, “Al Qaeda Strikes Back,” *New York Times*, nytimes.com (7 May 2007). <http://www.nytimes.com/cfr/world/20070501faessay_v86n3_riedel.html>, accessed 23 May 2007.

²³ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Winning the ‘War on Terrorism’: a Fundamentally Different Strategy.” *Middle East*, (25 September, 2006).

communal conflict, military coups, insurgency, and revolution, and are fertile grounds or political violence and terrorist group formation.”²⁴ The outbreak of the civil war can thus be seen as a socio-economic process aimed at encouraging accumulation of wealth.

Michael Moran uses an implicit rational actor model to describe, driven by ideology, al Qaeda’s behavior. He argues that “When it comes to matters related to politics and war, al Qaeda maneuvers around its dogmas with alacrity,” and “Al Qaeda’s goals are set by fervent devotion to a radical religious ideology, but in its short-term behavior, it is a rational political actor operating according to the dictates of real politic.” According to al Qaeda, the organization sees extreme violence as a means of cleansing the world from bankrupt, idolatrous rulers. In this understanding, al Qaeda’s violence “is a part of wholly conventional war that by keeping alight the flame of Islam will nevertheless have near cosmic consequences.” Al Qaeda is able “to pursue its interests by any means available; conventional morality impinges on its political thought only with regard to its utility in manipulating others.”²⁵ Islamist terrorists, as well as, other terrorist groups, are not often senseless or indiscriminate in their attacks, even if they appear to be so. Their targeting choices are significantly driven by ideology. Drake explains that “Different ideologies of groups operating in the same geographical and social environment develop different patterns of target selection.”²⁶

b. Islamist Violence

Dolnik and Gunaratna believe that Islamist terrorist groups, with their different world view, are “more immune to indiscriminate mass-casualty violence than in the case of nationalist separatist groups.” However, in their irrational beliefs, Islamists are not “irrational fanatics who do not seek to benefit a constituency.”²⁷ The persistence

²⁴ Jerrold M. Post, Keven G. Ruby, Eric D. Shaw, “The Radical Group in Context: 1. An Integrated Framework for the Analysis of Group Risk for Terrorism” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2002): 78.

²⁵ Michael Moran, “The Pragmatic Fanaticism of al Qaeda: An Anatomy of Extremism in Middle Eastern Politics” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 117, No. 2 (2002): 187-182.

²⁶ C. J. M. Drake, “The Role of Ideology in Terrorists’ Target Selection,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 10, No 2 (Summer 1998): 69.

²⁷ Adam Dolnik, Rohan Gunaratna, “On the Nature of Religious Terrorism,” in Andrew T. H. Tan, *The Politics of Terrorism* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York), 86.

of indiscriminate violence has driven speculation that it is an irrational reflection of particular ideologies, sometimes based on and motivated by religion imperatives. Radical extremist groups are not absolutely rational in their decision making to use violence. They are driven by a mixture of expressive and rational motives to achieve their utopian goals.²⁸

Islamist terrorists from GIA in Algeria and al Qaeda in Iraq often legitimize their violence against civilians as a “Jihad permitted by the Quran essentially because of religious sanctions that allow the use of violence as an act of defense and to preserve the will of God in Islamic communities.”²⁹ The jihadists say that “they are committed to the destruction of the entire secular world because they believe this is a necessary first step to create an Islamic utopia on earth.”³⁰ Derived from the one verse in the Quran and a few in the Hadith, “the jihadis are convinced that creating fear in the hearts of the unbelievers is a tactic in their war supported by Islamic law.” Habecks writes that one of the main Islamic fundamentalism ideologues Sayyid Qutb “clearly was advocating the use of terror tactics not just against aggressors or open enemies of his version of Islam, but against anyone who did not support him.” Even though the Islamic jurisprudence determined that noncombatant women, children, and monks or nuns could not be killed, “almost every jihadist group affirms a desire to kill or maim man, women, and children in the most horrific ways in order to strike fear in their enemies.”³¹ What makes such groups especially dangerous is their belief that achieving their goals of killing of thousands of innocent civilians – including Muslims – is not only legally justified but commanded by God Himself. They see victims “not necessarily as an enemy whom one kills in hate or for symbolic value, but rather as poor human beings who will

²⁸ Jeffrey M. Bale, NS 4320 Islamic Fundamentalism, Naval Postgraduate School, autumn 2007.

²⁹ Amritha Venkatraman, “Religious Basic for Islamic Terrorism: The Quran and Its Interpretations,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 30, 3 (March 2007): 229-248.

³⁰ Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 7.

³¹ Ibid., 125-133.

be saved by being killed.” For these reasons, “killing thousands of people indiscriminately would be psychologically much easier than to do so as part of a political strategy or in revenge.”³²

Bryan Caplan argues in his model of rational irrationality that “religious terrorists and their sympathizers are irrational in the rational expectations of the term.” False beliefs lead them to “take the action that would be optimal if your belief were true, instead of the action that is optimal in the world as it is.” Terrorist’ irrational beliefs have consequences that are “primarily paid by other people.”³³

The Islamist extremists prefer a state of war to peace because it gives them the moral justification to acts of violence. Violence, in turn, offers them the illusion of power. By leveling mosques and killing many people, AQI jihadists assert that they “have ultimate control over the entity and its centrality.” Because power is largely a matter of perception, AQI created the impression that by perpetrating these horrific acts, it had “enormous power and that the ideologies behind them had cosmic importance.”³⁴

The “holy terror’s” “radically different value systems, mechanisms of legitimization and justification, concepts of morality, and Manichean world view” makes this type of terror predominantly different from secular terror. Hoffman argues that “for the religious terrorist, violence first and foremost is a sacramental act or divine duty executed in direct response to some theological demand or imperative.” Thus, while “secular terrorists generally consider indiscriminate violence immoral and counterproductive, religious terrorists regard such violence not only as morally justified, but as a necessary expedient for the attainment of their goals.” Finally, “where the secular terrorists see violence primarily as a mean to an end, the religious terrorists tend to view violence as an end in itself.”³⁵ Max Abrahams argues that Islamist terrorist groups with

³² Dolnik and Gunaratna, “On the Nature of Religious Terrorism,” 87.

³³ Bryan Caplan, “Terrorism: The Relevance of the Rational Choice Model,” May 2005, <<http://cipp.gmu.edu/archive/Relevance-of-the-Rational-Choice-Model-Caplan.pdf>> [Accessed 12 September 2007], 11-14.

³⁴ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 134.

³⁵ Bruce Hoffman, “‘Holy Terror:’ The Implications of Terrorism Motivated by a Religious Imperative,” (RAND, 1993), 2.

their “maximalist objectives,” based on radical religious ideology “aimed to destroy a target’s state society and values,” and more importantly “whose attacks on civilian targets outnumbered attacks on military targets” usually fail to achieve their policy objectives using coercion.³⁶

c. Overall Literature Assessment

Studies on large scale violence perpetrated by Islamist groups against civilians in civil wars generally agree that this violence is driven by logic. Violence, as a mean, is used by political actors against civilians in order to shape their political behavior. Contrary to popular belief that the GIA in Algeria or al Qaeda in Iraq kills simply because they are motivated by ideology, numerous authors provide evidence that it is a rational strategy to reach their goals.

Not all authors agree on the causes of such violence, but common themes emerge, that under certain conditions, a strategy of indiscriminate violence is counter-productive.

C. INSURGENTS’ VIOLENCE

Indiscriminative, large scale violence against civilians has always been seen as an essential component and natural outcome of war - civil war in particular.³⁷ What differentiate most civil wars from other forms of political instability are the levels of violence produced in these conflicts.³⁸

The radical jihadists from GIA had become key players in the insurgency against the military regime in Algeria, just as al Qaeda in Iraq resisted the authority of Iraqi Interim Government and United States occupation. Even though the manpower and

³⁶ Max Abrahms, “Why Terrorism does not Work,” *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Fall 2006), 43-77.

³⁷ Stathis Kalyvas defines civil war as “armed combat within boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities.” In Stathis N. Kalyvas *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

³⁸ Jeremy Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199.

number of attacks attributed to GIA and al Qaeda in Mesopotamia have been overstated, many observers argue that what is uniquely dangerous about these groups is the spectacular and ruthless nature of their violence. GIA's and AQI's methods are presumed to be more dramatic, more provocative, and have a greater ripple effect on the countries' fragile political environment.

Violence and massacres of noncombatants, however, are neither unique to the Islamist insurgents in Algeria nor to insurgents in Iraq. Kalyvas believes that targeting civilians is a common consequence of armed conflict. Intentional killing of noncombatants in times of war is often a part of an insurgent's deliberate, military strategy designed to combat regime forces or other rivals in insurgency, and "to shape popular support (or collaboration) and deter collaboration with their rival (or detection)."³⁹ As a strategically weaker side, insurgents avoid conventional battles with regime forces, preferring to use covert and surprise tactics, often focusing on noncombatants, whom they depend on for support and sustenance and as a shield against detection. Weinstain argues that "Civilian support is important to the outcome of conflict: noncombatants are in position of power, able to shift their support from one side to another, to provide or withhold resources necessary for the groups' operation, and to offer information to combatants about who is supporting the opposition."⁴⁰

1. Terror as a Strategy

Charles Tilly acknowledges that "considered as a strategy, terror works best when it alters or inhibits the target's disapproved behavior, fortifies the perpetrators' standing with potential allies, and moves third parties toward greater cooperation with perpetrators' organization and announced program."⁴¹ Ariel Merari affirms that insurgent

³⁹ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 12.

⁴⁰ Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, 203.

⁴¹ Charles Tilly, "Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists," *Sociological Theory* (March 2004): 9.

strategies may take a variety of forms among which terrorism, the easiest form of insurgency, always takes place.⁴²

Islamist terrorist groups, as other political actors, deploy violence to achieve certain goals. Political actors do not need to use violence if they enjoy high levels of control and cannot use selective violence when they have no control. As a result, sometimes they decide to use indiscriminate acts of violence, even though the logic behind this violence can be counterproductive.⁴³ The primary significance of violence against civilians lies in its consequences. To its proponents, violence is not an end in itself but a means to achieve certain political and social outcomes.

In the case of violence by organized Islamic groups, the purposive nature of the violence is usually obvious, since the groups issue statements and communiqués. Being a resource, rather than the final product, violence is primarily used to control a population. Violence is intended to shape the behavior of the targeted audience by changing the expected value of particular actions. However, it is not necessary for the Islamist terrorist groups to resort to violence in massive way; they choose to kill hundreds, instead of a single person. Massive violence performs a communicative function with a clear deterrent aspect and can be used both in tactical and strategic levels.⁴⁴ In any case, insurgents must communicate effectively to their audience the idea that terror is the only weapon appropriate to the situation. Thomas Thornton argues that “Whatever justification the insurgents create, the dysfunctional use of indiscriminate violence is considered immoral and as a sign of weakness and a dangerous extremist mentality of those using it.”⁴⁵

⁴² Ariel Merari, “Terrorism as a Strategy of Insurgency,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter 1993): 213.

⁴³ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁵ Thomas Perry Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon,” in *Internal War: Problems and Approaches*, ed. Harry Eckstein (Greenwood Press Reprint, December 1980), 76.

2. Indiscriminate Violence

The differentiation between selective and indiscriminate violence depends on public perceptions, since it is possible to pretend to be selective by indiscriminately targeting isolated civilians. Indiscriminate violence is much more visible than its selective counterpart and, as such, is seen to be more common. To distinguish between indiscriminate and discriminate violence is very difficult. Kalyvas argues that when people are unsure of what to expect from insurgents and start to perceive insurgent violence as indiscriminate, not selective, the result of using of this tactic is that it may backfire and cause defection to the regime instead of causing support of the insurgents.⁴⁶ What is more, when civilians became convinced that insurgents may abuse them, they often choose to resist.⁴⁷ Indiscrimination is often thought of as a necessary attribute of a terrorist campaign. If terrorists do not want be relatively easy to combat, they must stay unpredictable in their use of violence. However, total indiscrimination is not reasonable and such “terror is most effective when it is indiscriminate in appearance but highly discriminate in fact.”⁴⁸

The significance of indiscriminate violence is usually overstated because of low visibility that selective violence produces. The low cost of indiscriminate violence can also explain the emergence of this type of violence. It is easier to kill the innocent people on the street than identify, locate, and attack enemies in their strongholds.

The insurgent’s use of indiscriminate violence is related to lack of information rather than ideology. Insurgent groups deliberately employ violence to maintain civilian support in order to avoid civilians’ detection, which may have “potentially devastating consequences for a group’s survival.”⁴⁹ The main goal of indiscriminate violence is to shape civilian behavior indirectly through association. Indiscriminate violence targets people independently of what they did or could have done. The negative consequence of

⁴⁶ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 145.

⁴⁷ Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, 206.

⁴⁸ Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon,” 82.

⁴⁹ Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, 203.

using it is that it is perceived as deeply unfair and immoderate. It may cause emotional reactions like anger, resentment and desire for revenge, making people, especially those more impatient and eager, “to undertake risky actions.”⁵⁰

Insurgents’ behavior in the conflict, especially in its early stages, shapes civilians’ expectations about how groups are likely behave in the future. Despite the “breakdown of institutions and physical infrastructure, information manages to flow during civil wars.” From village to village and city to city information about attacks and insurgents’ behavior spreads quickly, often damaging the group’s reputation.⁵¹ Indiscriminate violence may appear excessive and unjustified and, as a result, alienate the population. It may cause the insurgents, loss of popular support. Islamist terrorists try to compensate this potential alienation by justifying their actions as the “result of the absence of choice or the need to response to the regime violence.”⁵²

Insurgents’ indiscriminate violence often generates incentives for collaboration with the regime, thus generating defection instead of deterring it. Those Sunnis who supported AQI were almost as unsafe as those who were not taking sides or opposing it. Facing massive strikes of suicide bombers and car bombings on a daily basis they could do little or nothing to escape death. “Confronted with high levels of indiscriminate violence, many people prefer to join the rival actor,” who best guarantees their security, “rather than die a defenseless death” in the street or in the bazaar in a suicide attack.⁵³

GIA in Algeria expanded its violence to those who were either unable or unwilling to support the Islamist cause. Many people wanted to carry on with their lives and did not wish to take sides in the conflict. For radical jihadists, it was a treachery that

⁵⁰ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 154.

⁵¹ Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*, 206.

⁵² Martha Crenshaw, “The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice,” in *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, ed. Walter Reigh (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1998), 17.

⁵³ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, 160.

must be punished by death. The expanding violence against civilians led to greater defection to the regime, mainly by the creation of self-defending, anti-insurgent militias.⁵⁴

Indiscriminate violence is seen as an essential element of terrorism. Indiscriminate terrorism is directed against anonymous individuals by the prism of their belonging to a specific ethnic or religious group, nationality or some other collectivity. Islamist terrorists that target civilians indiscriminately display varying degrees of tolerance for harming anonymous bystanders. When terrorists indiscriminately attack civilians, they usually attack those categories of noncombatants which they see as benefiting from, supporting or having a significant capability to influence the government. The main strategic objective is to “induce complicitous civilians to stop supporting or to proactively demand changes in, certain government policies or the government itself.”⁵⁵ Indiscriminate violence, like other forms of political violence, is used to achieve a variety of objectives; however, this type of violence is used mainly to control a population, rather than looting, displacing, or eliminating it.

Indiscriminate violence by insurgents may make civilians exhausted of the war and force them to commit themselves to one side. Civilians who had initially collaborated and supported insurgents formed militias and set up watch posts around their villages and towns to prevent the insurgents from entering and obtaining supplies. They even started to physically fight insurgent groups.

Violence often involves a wide range of tactics. AQI’s suicide missions are one of the methods of indiscriminate violence used to deter civilians. They mostly occur in places and times where selective violence is extremely difficult or impossible to control.

⁵⁴ Mohammed M. Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres: A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria.” in *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*, ed. Quintan Wiktorowicz (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 37-53.

⁵⁵ Jeff Goodwin, “A Theory of Categorical Terrorism,” *Social Forces*, Vol. 84, No. 4 (June 2006): 2038.

3. Mass Casualty Violence

The war in Iraq has seen a disproportionately large numbers of mass casualty suicide bombings causing thousands of deaths. This is a significant distinction in terrorist tactic compared to mass massacres perpetrated by GIA during the civil war in Algeria. Many of these attacks were carried out in such a manner as to be both dramatic and horrifying. The explosive devices used were often aimed at killing and wounded massive numbers of people rather than damaging buildings. Jihadists “are certainly willing to risk the deaths of innocent Muslims by using weapons that cannot discriminate between soldiers and civilians and by attacking their enemies in public places frequented by noncombatants.”⁵⁶

Valentino defines mass killing as the intentional killing of massive numbers of civilians, members of any kind of ethnic, religious or political group – “at least 50,000 intentional deaths over the course of five years or less.”⁵⁷ Chris Quillen, analyzing mass casualty bombers whom he describes as modern terrorists, used criterion of 25 deaths or more in a bombing attack.⁵⁸

However, the cost and risks of massive, indiscriminate violence – including its potential to provoke greater opposition, alienate supporters, and draw third parties into conflict – often outweigh its potential as an insurgent’s strategy. Quillen argues that “Inadvertently or purposefully killing a large number of people may cause a backlash among the group’s supporters or potential supporters”⁵⁹ and may launch a process of massive dissatisfaction and even armed resistance.

4. Consequences of Violence

Violence against civilians oftentimes is likely to produce gradual changes in public attitudes, social behavior and the economy. Depending on the level of population

⁵⁶ Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 167.

⁵⁷ Valentino, “Draining the Sea: Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare,” 378.

⁵⁸ Chris Quillen, “A Historical Analysis of Mass Casualty Bombers,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, (February 2002): 280.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 280.

response to violence, terrorist may achieve: enthusiasm, fright, anxiety and despair – the most extreme level of response.⁶⁰ The most easily seen consequences of violence are those of immediate and direct effects: people killed and property destroyed. These impacts in their turn can eventually produce changes in peoples' attitudes and behavior in a variety of contexts: economic, social and political.

The “open season” and declared *takfir*, accusation of apostasy, on the entire group of Muslims, as well as the demonstrative nature of indiscriminate killings or maiming of innocent people has a secondary impact. They draw out “feelings of revulsion and anger in those who witness them.”⁶¹ Excessive violence may “lead civilians to flee, undermining a group’s ability to obtain the support it needs to survive.”⁶² People may be so disaffected and alienated from the insurgents that they refuse to cooperate with them.

Carter Malkasian argues that “Perceptions matter in a guerrilla war, as in all conflict.” Local population perceiving the government or occupying power as uninterested to lower the costs of counterinsurgency may join an insurgency or actively support it. Most importantly, “they may abandon the insurgency because they perceive insurgent violence as pointless in the face of a determined government or occupying power.”⁶³ “In the long term, a group’s abusiveness may destroy the human and physical base of the local economy on which armed groups often depend.” The economy will be affected as production or the black market is disrupted and people migrate from violent areas. What is more, in a presence of a totally insecure environment, social activities will decline if people are afraid to go out. Most importantly, incapability of the local regime or occupying power to suppress the insurgency and “to enforce its rule over the population can create chaos and dissatisfaction, and consequently breakdown in law-and-

⁶⁰ Thornton, “Terror as a Weapon of Political Agitation,” 80.

⁶¹ Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 122.

⁶² Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, “Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (August 2006): 430.

⁶³ Carter Malkasian, “Signaling Resolve: Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (June 2006): 423.

order might result in an increase in ordinary crime.”⁶⁴ Some Sunni tribes in Iraq became alienated by al Qaeda atrocities and intimidations against Sunni civilians who were supporting Islamist fighters, as well as AQI’s disruption of local business, started to cooperate with American forces. They formed the Al Anbar Salvation Council and local militias to combat the threat from al Qaeda and to expel the extremists from their territories.⁶⁵

Insurgents try to avoid striking indiscriminately against civilians for several reasons. Civilians may be potential members or allies of their movement, thus the use of indiscriminate violence may anger or repel them and may cause their defection to regime. This tactic may be seen as harmful to the cause and can prevent or break alliances with actual or potentially sympathetic third parties. Terrorism may also provoke state repression (for which insurgents will be blamed by their constituents) and what is more, state repression may weaken or even destroy the movement itself.⁶⁶ To be successful, insurgents must be selective in their use of violence to avoid alienating the civilians on whom they depend.⁶⁷ As noted by Kalyvas, “To be efficient, terror needs to be selective; indiscriminate terror tends to be counterproductive. In a regime of indiscriminate terror, compliance guarantees no security; in such a situation joining the opponent can actually increase the probability of individual survival.”⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Christopher Hewitt, *Consequences of Political Violence* (England: Dartmouth Publishing Company Limited, 1993, 8.

⁶⁵ Jane’s Terrorism & Security Monitor, “Iraq’s Escalating Insurgency,” (17 January 2007), <http://www4.janes.com/subscribe/jtsm/doc_view.jsp?K2DocKey=/content1/jane> [Accessed 29 April 2007].

⁶⁶ Goodwin, “A Theory of Categorical Terrorism,” 2038.

⁶⁷ Valentino, “Draining the Sea: Mass Killing and Guerrilla Warfare,” 385.

⁶⁸ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Wanton and Senseless? The Logic of Massacres in Algeria.” *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (1999): 251.

D. CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to answer an important question: Why do Islamist insurgents resort to anti-civilian violence? Through the review of the existing literature on the subject of indiscriminate violence against noncombatants, some general themes are obvious.

First, much of the violence directed at civilians in the course of war is intended. The main goal of this violence is to shape civilian behavior and maintain its support. High levels of indiscriminate violence are committed by insurgent groups that are unable to stop defection in their ranks, lose on the battlefield or operate in an ethnically fragmented environment. Indiscriminate violence is easier and cheaper than selective violence.

Second, contrary to popular belief indiscriminate violence against civilians is not only an irrational example of random violence motivated by Islamist ideology, as typically described in the media; it can also be understood as part of a rational strategy. This is initiated by the Al Qaeda in Iraq, aiming to maximize civilian support under a particular set of restraints. The Islamist ideology insufficiently explains the decision to rely on violence as a means to an end.

Third, indiscriminate violence seems to be counterproductive. In this context compliance is almost as unsafe as noncompliance. The victims perceive the threat to be so great and unavoidable that may shift their support to the political actor who can provide credible protection against violence. The expanding violence against civilians alienated Islamists from local population, generated resistance and led to greater defections to the regime, mainly in the form of anti-insurgent militias. This response further enraged GIA and AQI jihadists and led them to take revenge.

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II. CASE STUDY: VIOLENCE IN THE CIVIL WAR IN ALGERIA

A. INTRODUCTION

The first chapter discussed the broader implications of the insurgents' use of indiscriminate violence (that result in mass casualties) against civilians in civil war. This chapter presents the case study of the use of violence by radical jihadists from the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) in the Algerian Civil War in 1992-1999. During the 1990s, the GIA had become a key player in the insurgency against the military regime in Algeria and "was responsible for an outbreak of civilian massacres that were notorious for their brutality."⁶⁹ The spectacular and ruthless nature of the GIA violence had a great ripple effect on the country's fragile political environment. During the conflict, some 150,000 people were estimated to have been killed in the terrorist insurgency, characterized by incredible cruelty on both sides.

The GIA's expanding atrocities against civilians turned popular support dramatically against the Islamic movement, producing the surprising outcome of great civilian defection to the regime. The large scale of the *Jihadists'* violence destroyed the image of jihad and alienated the group from the population so much, that the organization "could no longer reach its objective of political inclusion through the use of violence."⁷⁰

The purpose of studying the Algerian Civil War in the 1990s is to analyze the mechanisms of a fact traditionally regarded as irrational: massive scale of ridiculous acts of violence in a civil war and the outcome this violence can produce. More specifically, the purpose is to examine the GIA's wanton violence and reckless massacres as a rational strategy, aimed at maximizing civilian support and punishing and preventing civilian defection under specific constraints. These acts of violence were not only driven by a

⁶⁹ Hafez, "From Marginalization to Massacres: A Political Process Explanation of GIA Violence in Algeria," 20.

⁷⁰ Wiktorowicz, "Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War," 8.

radical Islamist ideology that justifies the extermination of some categories of people or senseless killings, but were strategically and carefully calculated to be dramatic and provocative.

B. ALGERIAN CIVIL WAR

1. Background: Stolen Election – Guerilla War Begins

The development of a radical Islamist movement has been a major feature of Algerian political life since the mid-1970s, which represented a profound challenge to the Algerian nation-state. Radical Islamism rejected the idea of an Algerian nation-state and its principle, the conception of the Algerian people as constituting a nation. In opposition, they offered the Islamic conception of the *umma*, the universal community of believers whose existence could be guaranteed only by a government based upon *Shari'a* - Islamic law. The Algerian case exemplified the beliefs of radical Islamism that generally derived its inspiration from the *Salafiyya* movement. Islamist ideas mobilized a significant number of Algerians, who were frustrated by the stagnation of the Algerian economy, failure of Arabization of the public administration, decades of little political freedom and a poor educational system. Thus a sustained opposition to the state occurred.⁷¹

Formed in 1998, the largest and most influential party, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) had won the 1990 local and regional elections, causing the humiliating defeat of the ruling coalition – National Liberation Front (FLN). What is more, in December 1991 FIS captured 188 out of 430 parliamentary seats in the first round of the first open legislative elections.⁷² The Islamist party's objective was to set up an Islamic state in Algeria and to strengthen the religious aspects of the state that had always existed, but which had become obscured by the hegemony of the small secularist minority. Martinez states that “Its program worried a section of society and the military leaders who were afraid of

⁷¹ Hugh Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1998-2002* (London, New York: Verso, 2003), 3-22.

⁷² Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution, and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996), 2.

becoming expiatory victims of an Islamic regime based on righteousness.”⁷³ When elections were ultimately rescheduled for December 1991 and the FIS was once again on the verge of achieving a decisive electoral victory, the army generals staged a coup d’etat, halting the democratic experiment and banned the FIS. Those events set off an armed confrontation and Algeria found itself in the middle of a civil war.⁷⁴ The regime outlawed the FIS and its related Islamist organizations, dissolved city halls the FIS had conquered in 1990 and attempted to wrest control of insubordinate mosques. “The military coup discredited the moderate wing of the FIS that had put such trust in electoral institutions as a way to bring about change. This, along with the fact that many of the key leaders of the FIS were in prison, allowed more radical elements to rise to the fore, especially those who formed the Armed Islamic Group (GIA).”⁷⁵

2. History of Violence in Algeria

The history of 1990s Islamist violence in Algeria had its beginning with Mustafa Bouyali’s Armed Islamic Algerian Movement, which for five years (until his death in 1987), led bloody campaigns against representatives of the regime. He had become a symbol for many Algerians, to which they would later return. Many former members of its movement later joined the FIS, and when the FIS was banned, many militants “turned to guerrilla activity as the only strategic option left to them.”⁷⁶ Bouyali’s involvement in criminal activities anticipated the crimes committed by the AIS and the GIA. The Algerian “Afghans,” veterans of the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation, also played an important role in the formation of the Islamic extremist groups. They formed the core of the hard-line fundamentalists fighting to topple the military backed government and established an Islamic state.⁷⁷ Their first attack on a border post at

⁷³ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., xiii.

⁷⁵ Ray Takeyh, “Islamism in Algeria: A Struggle between Hope and Agony,” *Middle East Policy*, (Summer 2003), <<http://www.cfr.org/publication/7335>> [Accessed 23 June 2007].

⁷⁶ Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1998-2002*, 154.

⁷⁷ “Arab Veterans of Afghanistan War Lead New Islamic Holy War,” (28 October, 1994), <http://www.fas.org/irp/news/1994/afghan_war_vetrans.html> [Accessed 16 June 2007].

Guemmer in November 1991 “is usually considered to mark the beginning of the political violence of the post-Chadli crisis.” The Algerian regime pointed to this episode “during and after parliamentary campaign as revealing the Islamist’ true intentions.”⁷⁸ However, “the ubiquity of violence in Algeria’s past is another potential reason for the fierce character of the … struggle.” At almost every period in Algerian history, from the Muslim conquest, through the Ottoman rule and especially during French colonialism, “Algerian’s relation to the state and to politics generally has been one of coercion, force and resistance.”⁷⁹ Above all, “the mythicised experience of the war of independence and of mudjahidine who fought in it played a disproportionately large part in the psychology of Algerians in the 1980s and 1990s.” Algeria’s Islamists sought to portray their fight as the final phase of the liberation, and that the armed struggle was most the honorable way to achieve justice.⁸⁰

3. Islamist Resistance

Following cancellation of the elections and proclamation of the state of emergency in 1992, armed Islamist organizations emerged publicly to challenge the regime. Those events put an end to any legitimacy for the regime in the eyes of those who had voted for the FIS, and created conditions for marginal groups to capitalize on the disarray of the ex-FIS electorate and thus legitimize jihad. Graham Fuller notices that “What had been emerging as uncomfortable accommodation between a reformist presidency and the FIS suddenly turned into a zero-sum game that has brought the country into a state of massive violence, paralysis, and guerilla warfare.”⁸¹

There were around sixty Islamic extremist groups in Algeria in the mid and late 1990s. They ranged from small cells operating in urban areas to militias boasting as many

⁷⁸ Martin Stone, *The Agony of Algeria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 184.

⁷⁹ Malley, *The Call from Algeria*, 245-247.

⁸⁰ Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, 179.

⁸¹ Graham E. Fuller, *Algeria: The next Fundamentalist State?* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, Arroyo Center, 1996), 37.

as 50-60 armed guerrillas active in remote mountainous areas.⁸² Security forces soon neutralized the small groups that started jihad, such as Takfir wa-l Hijra. Since the banning of the FIS in March 1992, in opposition of the regime the Islamic Armed Movement (MIA) was founded.⁸³ It was the largest and most broadly based Islamic extremist organization among ex-FIS sympathizers in the early stages of civil war. It attracted all of the discontented people that wanted some action. For five years, this Islamist organization led bloody attacks against security forces and representatives of the state.⁸⁴ Its strategy of using violence aimed to encourage the state to regret its decision to ban the FIS and to legalize the Islamist party again. Roberts notices that “Challenge that the GIA posed to the MIA has apparently made impossible for the MIA to envisage any negotiated settlement for as long as it has been in danger of being outflanked by an apparently more radical rival.” This competition between the two movements was thus the immediate cause of the spiraling intensity of violence since January 1994.⁸⁵

The fundamental change in the situation in 1994 led to the transformation of the Algerian Islamic Movement (MIA) into the Islamic Salvation Army (AIS). The objective of this change was to “correct the growing perception of MIA as a ‘moderate’ organization whose emir lacked the determination and brutality of the feared GIA.” The AIS publicly proclaimed its allegiance to the FIS, becoming its armed wing. The new group concentrated its attacks on the security forces and state employees, and had regularly condemned the killing of innocent civilians and foreigners perpetrated by the GIA.⁸⁶ Apart from the GIA, none of armed Islamist groups succeeded in grabbing national and international media attention for their military actions and political demands.

⁸² Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, 178.

⁸³ Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1998-2002*, 153.

⁸⁴ Malley, *The Call from Algeria*, 245.

⁸⁵ Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1998-2002*, 155.

⁸⁶ Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, 187.

C. ARMED ISLAMIC GROUP (GIA)

1. GIA Emergence

In 1993, a new Islamist faction emerged as the main Islamic force, the Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armee, GIA), which had greatly threatened the MIA's position and undermined prospects of a political compromise between the FIS and the government. Wiktorowicz writes that "The GIA quickly distinguished itself from other armed groups through its willingness to use extreme forms of violence."⁸⁷ Martinez suggests that "The failure of the 'people' to raise up against the regime convinced" Islamist factions "that war cannot be prosecuted on the basis of the people's spontaneous feelings." The ex-FIS sympathizers "recognized the legitimacy of their struggle and gave them the necessary support." For the jihadists and for the regime forces, "control of the Islamist communes became a military and political stake in the conflict."⁸⁸

The FIS maintained its position that resorting to armed attacks against the state had been justified as an instance of legitimate rebellion against an illegitimate regime, with the aim to return to constitutional legitimacy and readmit the banned FIS to the legal political process. This doctrine sharply distinguished the FIS from the extreme revolutionary jihad of the GIA. The Armed Islamic Group turned to violence in order to secure the revolutionary overthrow of the state and "employed violence against civilians and foreigners in a strategy of imposing Islamist power and the Islamist agenda by indiscriminate terror."⁸⁹

The political view of the conflict was based on Qari Said's, one of the GIA's ideologues, motto: "No dialog, no reconciliation, no truce."⁹⁰ The radicalism of this approach led to the temporary marginalization of the other armed Islamist organizations. The GIA condemned the FIS electoral strategy and ominously declared, "Power is within

⁸⁷ Wiktorowicz, "Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War," 5.

⁸⁸ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 72-73.

⁸⁹ Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1988-2002*, 172.

⁹⁰ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 209.

the range of our Kalashnikovs.” Ray Takeyeh believes that the GIA’s philosophy professed that the “failure of the Islamic movement to reclaim power was due to a lack of resolution in the pursuit of jihad.” Based on the experience of the GIA leaders who had fought as volunteers against the Soviets in Afghanistan during the 1980s, the argument that guerilla force could bring down an illegitimate regime had found wide audience.⁹¹

Until September 1993, the term “GIA” did not appear in the Algerian press, even though some followers of a leading “Afghan” extremist Abdelhak Layada used this term when occasionally attacking women, journalists and intellectuals. In response to intensified Algerian security forces’ operations against guerrillas, the “Afghans” began to form more closely organized groups around Algiers.” Because of “army and police forces’ brutality, young people were more likely to join the radical GIA than the more modest AIS.⁹²

2. GIA Objectives

The main objective for the GIA was to overthrow the secular regime in Algeria and to replace it with an Islamic state. In pursuit of this goal, the organization refused any unity with the FIS and made it clear that it was not its armed wing. Takeyeh admits that the jihadists stated clearly, “their goal diverged from that of the FIS; they did not seek the resumption of the electoral process or the rehabilitation of the political order, but the creation of an Islamic Utopia through armed resistance. The human way - elections - had failed. Now the only option was to engage in jihad against an illegitimate regime that claimed to be Muslim but that was, in the eyes of the radicals, an infidel order.” He notices that “The challenge of the GIA was not just to the regime but to moderate Islamists who had participated in the political process and accepted its demands and limitations.”⁹³ Malley believes that “The GIA grew out of this sentiment as a collection of scattered groups determined to use violence at all costs.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Ray Takeyeh, “Islamism in Algeria: A Struggle between Hope and Agony.”

⁹² Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, 187.

⁹³ Takeyeh, “Islamism in Algeria: A Struggle between Hope and Agony.”

⁹⁴ Malley, *The Call from Algeria*, 246.

Under its first leader, Mansouri, the GIA shared the MIA's objectives and general approach. However, following his capture by the security forces, the GIA adopted a different orientation, which tended to involve the immediate and coercive re-Islamisation of the populations of the areas it controlled, a strategy that pitted it not only against these populations, but also against MIA and, subsequently, the AIS.

3. GIA Mobilizing Structures

a. Manpower Mobilization

The GIA was formed by a coalition of the former followers of Mustafa Bouyali movement, the “Afghans” and hardliner dissidents from the MIA and the FIS, which were favoring a strategy of violence. Martinez notices that the GIA realized there existed among the young, undereducated and mostly unemployed Algerians (who were increasingly turning to militant Islam), “a deep-seated desire for dissidence.”⁹⁵ The organization, though, recruited its fighters from among the disaffected youth of the slums, the unemployed, veterans of the Afghan war, and members of criminal gangs for whom the politicization of banditry offered a unique means of social rehabilitation.⁹⁶ The decision to join the organization seemed to be based on social alienation, rather than by religious conviction. It became an exclusive organization bent on a total war against the ruling regime. All groups and individuals who wanted to join the GIA had to declare their allegiance to the *Salafiyya* tradition and abandon any previously held “innovations.”⁹⁷

b. Group Organization

The GIA was composed of several separate groups of an estimated strength of 20,000 fighters in the *El-Djama'a* (military wing of the GIA). They operated in different areas, especially in Sidi Bel Abbes in the west, the Medea district south of Algiers, the eastern suburbs of Algiers and the Jijel district in northeastern Algeria. These

⁹⁵ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 207.

⁹⁶ Malley, *The Call from Algeria*, 246.

⁹⁷ Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 47.

groups were more or less autonomous, but had in common their absolute refusal of any dialogue or negotiation with the state, and their ruthless employment of the most cruel and savage methods. The GIA gave its armed groups complete autonomy, and every suburban Emir had the right to represent the organization in his commune.

4. GIA - Anti-system Movement; Conflict of Values

Havez describes the GIA as “an exclusive organization bent on a total war against the ruling regime” that sought to overthrow incumbent government. Although the military coup of 1992 was the impetus for armed struggle, the leaders of the GIA portrayed *jihad* as a struggle against apostasy, infidelism, and tyrannical rule. Moreover, the GIA did not make any distinctions among non-GIA Algerians. Anyone who sustained the regime in one way or another, even through tacit approval, was considered an apostate, infidel, or tyrant, and consequently deserved death.⁹⁸ The GIA classification of people “as either ‘enemies of Islam’ or ‘supporters of the *jihad*,’” called upon civilians to “choose sights under pain of death.”⁹⁹

The Armed Islamic Group rejected the notion that its struggle was a response to the military coup. The organization viewed its *jihad* as a broader struggle to free the Muslim world of un-Islamic rulers and establish the “rule of God” and as such, treated the struggle in Algeria as a part of the larger struggle against apostasy and infidelism.¹⁰⁰ In this context, the Algerian regime was considered as illegitimate; thus none of its polity members or constituency was considered innocent. Transferring from the political aspects to the religious turned the struggle into a conflict of values. The GIA gave new meaning to the word *jihad*: “The *jihad* in Algeria is an absolute religious obligation which is imposed on everyone, like fasting, prayer, the almsgiving required by law and the Pilgrimage, and the killing of foreigners forms part of this major obligation.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 44-47.

⁹⁹ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 208.

¹⁰⁰ Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 49.

¹⁰¹ *EL Ansar*, July 1994. in *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998* ed. Martinez, 210.

The GIA, by “describing the Algerian ruling regime as apostate and infidel,” wanted to encourage people to turn against the government. Hafez admits, “These terms are very strong symbols deeply rooted in Islamic traditions and full of implied meaning. They suggest mutual negation, irreconcilability, and total war. In Islam, infidelism – non-belief in creator - is one of the greatest sins one can commit, especially when ruling among the Muslim community (*umma*). The Quran implores Muslims to struggle against infidels and promises great suffering toward unbelievers. Apostasy ... implies that reconciliation with the ruling regime is virtually impossible. In Islam, the punishment of an apostate is death; there can be no compromise with apostates unless they repent.”¹⁰² The generalization of the enemy allowed every type of action, and thus gave free reign to all armed bands claiming to follow it.

The GIA insisted the “jihad is an Islamic obligation until judgment day” and saw the war as a religious one imposed by God on Muslims. As the insurgency developed, the GIA portrayed its struggle also as one against historic “enemies” of Islam - the West, Crusaders, and Jews.¹⁰³ Wiktorowicz notices that in doing so, the GIA “turned against foreign nationals, issuing a statement warning all foreigners to leave the country.”¹⁰⁴

Habeck argues that in transferring the struggle into the conflict of values, the GIA combined the revolutionary principles of combating the people’s fear through terror and Sayyid Qutb’s redefined concept of *al Tawhid*, the divine and absolute unity of God. The GIA extremists gave *tawhid* political implications and used it to justify their violent acts. The principle of the government of God projects Islam to the core of the political arena.¹⁰⁵ Thus, “the GIA went to war against all the social groups, which involuntarily or deliberately, ensured that the regime continued in power.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 49.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁴ Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 6.

¹⁰⁵ Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 161.

¹⁰⁶ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 208.

5. GIA Action Repertoires

Takeyeh states that the action repertoires of the GIA “were equally questionable: using violence to challenge the notion of the regime’s invincibility and spark a mass uprising.”¹⁰⁷ Hence, the great number of urban terrorist acts and the indiscriminate assassination of persons viewed as belonging the regime’s sociopolitical basis: bureaucrats, journalists, foreigners, teachers, magistrates, and even the mothers, wives, and sisters of members of security forces.

The GIA used terrorist tactics and staged a series of ruthless atrocities to intimidate much of the population and ensure its domination over the Islamist movement. The young men were at stake as the civil war began. They were subject to the Algerian army, dependent on the draft system on the one hand, and to GIA *mujahidins* trying to weaken new intakes of conscripts, on the other. Martinez suggests that the violent acts and massacres committed against national service members were “aimed at polarizing allegiances and choices,” however, in consequence, “strengthened the troops’ solidarity and forced the national serviceman to stay in the army, as the only protection available against GIA reprisal.”¹⁰⁸

The war tactics of the GIA seemed unstoppable; its spectacular attacks, highlighted in the media, combined with a rapidly expanding war economy, attracted a large number of Islamist sympathizers and the suburban Islamist armed bands towards it, desiring to fight the regime’s security forces.¹⁰⁹ The ruthless techniques of violence, which were used by the GIA with the aim to mobilize an ambivalent Algerian population against the unpopular regime, however, failed and turned this population against the GIA.

6. Targets

Drake believes, even as “the ideology of a terrorist group sets out the moral parameters within they operate, the selection of targets is also affected by the effect or

¹⁰⁷ Takeyeh, “Islamism in Algeria: A Struggle between Hope and Agony.”

¹⁰⁸ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 79-80.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 208.

effects which they wish their violence to achieve.” The GIA leaders hoped that by attacking targets they had chosen they would “maximize the pressure upon the psychological target to behave in a certain fashion.”¹¹⁰ What distinguished the radical Salafi GIA from other Islamist groups was the acceptability of targeting civilians. Wiktorowicz argues that “A stark distinction between supporters and opponents of the jihad” allowed the GIA to attack the wide spectrum of targets. He writes that “Opponents included noncombatants who were deemed obstacles to the struggle, such as the press, academics, secularists, and various civil society leaders.” It also allowed certain GIA factions to expand this category to include ordinary Algerians, who through their everyday activities were seen as providing tacit approval for the regime. Wiktorowicz writes that “school children attending government schools, journalists providing negative coverage of Islamist actions, the leaders of civil society organizations that sponsored non-Islamist causes and anyone not actively supporting the jihad were judged apostates and legitimate targets of violence.”¹¹¹

a. Attacks on Regime Elements

Political violence in Algeria initially took the form of standard revolutionary clashes with security forces and assassinations of police officers, military personnel, regime officials and secular activists.¹¹² Since the beginning of the struggle, thousands of police officers and conscripts were killed in various parts of Algeria – often having throats cut or were beheaded. By the mid-1990s, the GIA was responsible for a large number of bomb explosions in popular markets, cafes, and other public spaces. The GIA, however, refused to distinguish between the Algerian state and those that worked for it in one way or another. They became legitimate targets for the organization. The GIA violence expanded to government officials, representatives of opposition groups, foreigners, journalists, intellectuals, and ordinary civilians killed randomly through bombings and deliberately through executions and massacres. The radical Islamists

¹¹⁰ C. J. M. Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 53.

¹¹¹ Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 2.

¹¹² Drake, *Terrorists' Target Selection*, 50.

resorted to bloody terror, instilling insecurity that aimed at “a political division of the population, between friends and enemies.”¹¹³ GIA strategy of terror continually increased the feeling of insecurity and forced people to take sides.

b. Attack on Civilians

Attacks against civilians targeted not only ordinary villagers and Algerian citizens, but also prominent cultural figures and civil society leaders such as student leaders, the director of the Algerian national theater, the head of a feminist organization, and many more. They were killed by the GIA for sponsoring ideas that were considered in opposition to Islam. Journalist, editors and other member of the press industry were also targeted in the offensive on the secular professions.¹¹⁴

The GIA also resorted to attacks on educational institutions, schools and universities because they served the secular government. Wiktorowicz notices that in the GIA’s perspective those who “continue their studies are helping the tyrant to ensure stability and thereby are not accomplishing the jihad.”¹¹⁵ In 1994, over eighty teachers were killed and six hundred schools were attacked, three universities and nine training institutes were burned or bombed. Because of such attacks, over 1,000 academics left Algeria.¹¹⁶

Algerian fundamentalists from GIA used a religious decree (*fetwa*), issued by the Egyptian fundamentalist sheikh Muhamad al-Gazali in June 1993, to legitimize killings of Muslim intellectuals as *Sharia* - decreed executions. In 1993, the GIA alone slew twelve leading Algerian intellectuals.¹¹⁷ According to this *fetwa*, “Every Muslim

¹¹³ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 78.

¹¹⁴ Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Drake, *Terrorists’ Target Selection*, 52.

¹¹⁷ Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalist Ideology: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 155.

who pleads for the suspension of the *Sharia* is an apostate and can be killed. The killing of those apostates cannot be prosecuted under Islamic law because this killing is justified.”¹¹⁸

c. Attacks on Foreigners

The GIA was responsible for great amounts of violence against foreigners working in Algeria. The GIA, by attacking foreign groups or individuals that in some way represented Western influence or secularism, wanted to “weaken a government already heavily in debt, and reduce western cultural influence.”¹¹⁹ In 1993, the Armed Islamic Group issued threats against all foreigners living or working in Algeria to leave the country under the penalty of being “killed in cold blood.”¹²⁰ At least 100 foreigners were killed during this conflict; some of them were French monks killed in very horrific ways.

d. Strategic Objectives

Drake argues that by attacking such a wide spectrum of targets, the GIA attempted to attain a number of strategic objectives. Attacks on the educational system and its representatives were aimed to disorientate the elite in Algeria and, together with more widespread attacks on ordinary civilians, tried to enforce compliance with the GIA’s political and religious demands. They also wanted to strengthen obedience to the terrorists’ religious principles. GIA’s violence against foreigners aspired to weaken the regime and damage the Algerian economy, and promote the terrorists’ cause. Killing police officers, soldiers and officials had functional and symbolic values of damaging the regime’s material ability to combat the terrorists, thus, demonstrating the weakness of the state.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalist Ideology*, 155.

¹¹⁹ Fuller, *Algeria: The Next Fundamentalist State?* 40.

¹²⁰ Drake, *Terrorists’ Target Selection*, 50.

¹²¹ Ibid., 52-53.

During the first two years of rebellion, the GIA's violence strengthened the terrorists' hold over the civil population and, consequently, the ability to extract support and resources from them. However, Takeyh states that "As the violence evolved, the GIA spectacularly miscalculated by turning against small merchants, entrepreneurs and petty bourgeoisie who had formed the backbone of the Islamic opposition. The GIA activists began to press these groups for funds and operated well-developed racketeering schemes. The movement that acclaimed piety and professed to create a virtuous order had turned into a violent street gang, provoking an orgy of violence." In 1997, the GIA adopted apocalyptic view of the struggle in which there was no place for neutrality "Except for those who are with us, all others are renegades."¹²²

e. *Liberated Areas - Regulating Behavior by Sharia*

In a series of communiqués beginning in 1994, the GIA attempted to enforce political and religious control by regulating the behavior of citizens in its strongholds and Algeria in general. Women who did not obey the terrorists' edicts on dress or education were attacked and sometimes killed. In 1995, the GIA ordered the wives of men employed by the state to leave their husbands because it deemed the latter to be apostates. In January 1996, it threatened to kill young men of draft age if they traveled outside their area of residence for an extended period (presumably to prevent them from being trained in government military camps).

In 1996, the GIA threatened to kill those who were engaging in what the GIA and other Islamists considered un-Islamic behaviors. This rationale aimed to justify vicious assaults against a wide variety of targets. The GIA argued that its religious duty is to eliminate "those who do not pray, who drink alcohol, take drugs, homosexuals, and immodest or debauched women," and those who fail to pay the *zakat* to the GIA. It threatened though to kill women who left their homes without wearing a *hijab*. It also prohibited people from going to places of bad reputation such as bars and video stores.¹²³ Even government mosques were considered off limits, and those who prayed in them

¹²² Takeyh, "Islamism in Algeria: A Struggle between Hope and Agony."

¹²³ Wiktorowicz, "Centrifugal Tendencies in Algerian Civil War," 4.

were labeled collaborators. In its “liberated zones,” the GIA demanded food supplies, contributions, shelter from local inhabitants and direct financial resources to the *mujahidin* until the condition of sufficiency (*kifaya*) was achieved.¹²⁴

The GIA, failing to overthrow the regime, adopted a policy of substitution for state institution. Although it did not occupy any city militarily, it remained present through whole networks of surveillance and control in urban areas, almost like other political criminal organizations. Martinez notices that after four years of ruthless war, the GIA’s record produced doubts among the population about the organization’s real intentions. The local population, especially Islamist sympathizers subject to the GIA emirs, became aware that the liberated areas were just an illusion, that they were more like areas deliberately abandoned by the security forces, turned into inaccessible and intolerable Islamist ghettos.¹²⁵

f. Local Commerce and Illicit Market

Martinez argues that the establishment of armed Islamist groups in the urban districts in 1994 stopped crimes because Islamists did not tolerate interference in their territory. The GIA declared war on the criminals, to the satisfaction of the local people and especially local petty traders. The criminals were called either to leave the area or to work with Islamist Groups.¹²⁶ Roberts reveals that in fact, the emirs of the GIA were actively involved in local level commerce and took an interest in the economic activity through smuggling and protection rackets of various kinds.¹²⁷ The absence of security forces or Islamist groups in the urban areas made people unprotected and favored organized crime elements. Criminals appeared to be the principal actors on the stage and many times they practiced “extortion for the GIA’s benefits.” The traders were the most penalized by demands from either Islamists or groups of criminals. For the local population, the view of criminals and GIA fighters operating together showed the true

¹²⁴ Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 51.

¹²⁵ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 84.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 75.

¹²⁷ Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1988-2002*, 257.

nature of local Islamist groups claiming to fight in the name of Armed Islamic Group.¹²⁸ Martinez notices that the GIA's cooperation with criminal bands and assimilation of some elements of the GIA into Mafioso activities was used by the Algerian regime as propaganda against the group in government's counter-guerilla struggle.¹²⁹

From its beginning, the GIA undertook the campaign of systematic demolition of railways, bridges, telephone lines and state enterprises. Control of highways became a stake in the rivalry between the AIS and GIA. Through the fake roadblocks, the GIA tried to mobilize the population against an unpopular regime, and what is more, it controlled a great number of commercial vehicle traffic that gave the organization "an assured income, which made its lightning rise possible."¹³⁰

Since the GIA in 1993 won the sympathy of the ex-FIS voters who saw them as defenders of the Islamic cause, expansion of the group seemed appealing. Martinez notices that "the first generation of fighters, considered as heroes, protectors and avengers in their home areas, were succeeded by bands whose activities ran counter to the interests of the 'cause.'" Forced to extract resources from their environment to remain in the field, GIA focused on "extortion from petty traders." In 1995, the GIA succeeded in holding the monopoly of extortion, eliminating other Islamist groups from these businesses.¹³¹

The armed Islamist groups consolidated their positions around the most dynamical economic zones, which derived their wealth from the informal economy or illicit dealings. The protection rackets went so far that petty traders stopped supplying them and a local counter resistance emerged, through formation of groups of patriots and militiamen in 1995. This led to many brutal killings of bakers, grocers, hardware

¹²⁸ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 76.

¹²⁹ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 217.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 213.

¹³¹ Ibid., 214-215.

merchants and jewelers, causing an exodus of those trades. Weakened by the loss of the essential part of their financial resources, the GIA pushed their districts into bloody terror.¹³²

They cut two young people's throats and placed their heads at the crossroads. That is not good, that. I think that if they go on doing that, people won't be with them any more. Let them kill the others, the thieves (criminal and political leaders), but they shouldn't cut people's throats...They cut you up into pieces as if you were a sheep. I tell you, people are going to turn against them if that continues. (Petty trader, 40 years old, Algiers suburbs, 1994)¹³³

D. MASSACRES

In 1997, the Armed Islamic Group committed large-scale ruthless massacres, which drew international attention to the civil war in Algeria. International media and organizations described these massacres as indiscriminate, senseless and incomprehensible acts of random butchery. Kalyvas notices that they overwhelmingly targeted civilians in Islamist strongholds who at one point supported Islamists, and provided them with aid and shelter. Massacres were concentrated in Algiers and towns to the southwest, including the area named the “triangle of death” - Medea, Blida, and Ain Defla, all of which constituted the geographic backbone of support for Islamism. These massacres featured the most barbaric forms of brutality, and included night raids against villages and small towns. The attackers rarely used bombs or firearms during these attacks. They killed whole families, including babies and elderly, “in a most brutal way, usually hacking them to death or slicing their throats, using knives, machetes and axes. In some cases corpses were mutilated, houses set on fire and women abducted to be raped and then killed.”¹³⁴

Hafez argues that the shift from targeting selected categories of civilians to the mass butchery of villages and hamlets was part and parcel to the gradual radicalization of

¹³², Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 94-107.

¹³³ Ibid., 109.

¹³⁴ Kalyvas, “The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” 247.

the struggle. Exclusive, anti-system organizations, such as the GIA, “often lose touch with political reality” and “do not readily accept the idea of ‘neutrality,’ thus leading to a broad categorization of legitimate targets. Anyone perceived as either supporting an ‘unjust’ social order or opposing the legitimacy of total war is part of the problem and hence fair game.”¹³⁵

The eruption of civilian massacres started in 1996 with the new leadership of Antar Zouabri. The new emir of the GIA initiated his “leadership by issuing a foreboding fatwa that charged the entire society with apostasy,” thus authorizing “attacks against any Algerian who did not join or aid the GIA, including other armed Islamist groups and dissident GIA factions operating independently of the central leadership.” According to the GIA doctrine, those that did not assist the GIA “are condemned as apostates and are therefore legitimate targets of jihad.” This position was made public in a GIA communiqué posted in an Algiers suburb in 1997: “There is no neutrality in the war we are waging. With the exception of those who are with us, all the others are apostates and deserve to die.”¹³⁶ Those who did not want to provide support became a legitimate target of the GIA attacks.

Kalyvas argues that massacres perpetrated by Islamist guerrillas in the Algerian Civil War on noncombatants were not random and thus were dissimilar from massacres perpetrated in most civil wars. The majority of these massacres were selective and targeted specific neighborhoods, individuals and families who participated in the government-sponsored militias, which were formed to protect secluded regions from radical Islamists. Other massacres targeted the families of AIS and GIA members who had abandoned the armed struggle in 1997. Most of the massacres of 1997 targeted former guerrilla supporters and “Islamists sympathizers who had either abandoned the rebels or were getting ready to.”¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 43.

¹³⁶ Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 4.

¹³⁷ Kalyvas, “The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” 255-277.

The GIA emir Abu al-Moudhir argued in response to accusations of indiscriminate violence that:

It is clear that there is no indiscriminate killing. Our fighters only kill those who deserve to die. We say to those who accuse us of indiscriminate killing that we will fight those traitors who have gone over to the *taghout* - Islamic government. We do no more, than carry out the wishes of God and the Prophet. When you hear of killings and throat-slitting in a town or a village, you should know it is a matter of the death of government partisans, or else it is the application of GIA communiqués ordering [us] to do good and combat evil.¹³⁸

Civilian populations that withdrew their support from the GIA were viewed as apostates and became “the enemies of our fighters, from the youngest of their children to the oldest of their elderly.”¹³⁹ In a communiqué of September 1997 GIA stated that:

The infidelism and apostasy of this hypocrite nation that turned away from backing and supporting the mujahidin will not bend our determination and will not hurt us at all, God willing....All the killing and slaughter, the massacres, the displacement [of people], the burnings, and the kidnappings ...are an offering to God.¹⁴⁰

The GIA lost the ability to control those who earlier “protected and supported them” and wanted to punish the villagers whom they accused of defecting to the government. Kalyvas believes that atrocities perpetrated by the GIA during these massacres “created an atmosphere of terror, where people feared not just being killed, but being killed in a particularly brutal way.”¹⁴¹ The expanding violence against civilians led to greater defections to the regime, principally in the form of anti-insurgents militias. This response further enraged GIA militants and led them to take revenge, even against those who at one point had offered moral, financial, and physical support.

In February 2002, Algeria’s security forces succeeded in killing Antar Zoubari, the sixth commander of the GIA and the purveyor of mass slaughter in Algeria. His

¹³⁸ AFP, 7 August 1997, in “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 4.

¹³⁹ Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 4.

¹⁴⁰ Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 52.

¹⁴¹ Kalyvas, “The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” 255-277.

death, however, did not bring about an end to violence. On the contrary, his successor, al-Rashid Abu Turab, issued a communiqué promising more “blood and blood, destruction and destruction,” escalating the violence by carrying out a number of massacres and random bombings in public places.¹⁴²

E. LOSING SUPPORT

Some elements of the GIA broke away from the organization because of politically aimless activities, increasingly indistinguishable from banditry, like organized plundering on passing traffic and the operation of protection rackets. Other elements broke away from it as the growing dissatisfaction spread among Algerians with Islamist ideology and the deviation from its original purposes. In 1995 and 1996, some of the militias in the GIA began to breakaway from the group, claiming the GIA had “deviated from the correct path of jihad” and committed crimes against innocent people. Two former FIS leaders, who joined GIA in 1994, withdrew their group, accusing the GIA of killing women and children. Others defected after the GIA executed former FIS leader and a member of the GIA’s consultative council- Muhammed Said, and Mahfouz Tajeen – the former leader of GIA. Disregarding with Zoubari policies of attacking civilians, the GIA emir of the second region Hassan Hattab withdrew from the organization’s leadership, and receiving support from a number Salafi figures in global jihad movement, including Osama Ben Laden, founded in 1998 a new group – Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), that dissociated it from massacres. The GSPC attracted dissidents from the GIA as well as the FIS, rejected the amnesty and has continued to fight.¹⁴³

In the autumn of 1997, the FIS decided to abandon the civil war, and the AIS announced a unilateral ceasefire. The ceasefire reduced the overall level of political violence and fragmented the armed Islamic groups. Brutal attacks against civilians perpetrated by the GIA, however, undermined and eroded the pragmatic and political position of the FIS. It was not seen any longer as a legitimate representative of the Algerian people and, in their eyes, *jihad* “became increasingly associated with atrocities.”

¹⁴² Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 53.

¹⁴³ Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 9.

Because of the massacres, popular opinion in Algeria turned against the Islamists. Even those who supported the FIS after a few years of sheltering the movement-either willingly or through coercion, discovered they were wrong.¹⁴⁴

The GIA violence, as well as the economic problems, was one of the leading events that consolidated the Algerian regime to the final defeat of the guerrillas. Martinez argues that while the military had succeeded in eroding Islamist electoral support, “misunderstanding of the nature of the problem remained ineffective against doctrine that had brought it about.” Even though the regime’s reconquest of the country in 1998 had risen against the limitations of the war economy, the whole spectrum of political, economic and social conditions that gave legitimacy to the Islamist mobilization remained unresolved. The latter’s revival of the economy and prosecution of economic reforms undermined the base of support for Islamist organizations from the Algerian youth.¹⁴⁵ By building bridges to the moderate Islamists, the military moved finally towards a democratic polity and ended the civil war that had brutalized an entire generation of the Algerian population. They shifted attention away from ideology toward economic progress, tapping into the desire of many Algerians for peace and reconstruction.¹⁴⁶

Martinez finds out after six years of civil war, the Algerian government succeeded in turning a conflict between Islamist guerrillas and the security forces into a ruthless struggle between the GIA and the AIS. In parallel with the “total war” against the armed Islamic groups, there was a gradual absorption and assimilation of the Islamist guerrillas into a society and the machinery of the state. A victory of the AIS over the GIA, helped by the backing of the army, hastened this process and confirmed that violence was viewed as a means to achieve political power.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Wiktorowicz, “Centrifugal Tendencies in the Algerian Civil War,” 8.

¹⁴⁵ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 218.

¹⁴⁶ Takeyh, “Islamism in Algeria: A Struggle between Hope and Agony.”

¹⁴⁷ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 19.

The communes under the GIA emirs sank into terror and monotony. The Islamist groups in urban areas became a burden and nuisance for the local population who realized their true nature and no longer saw its interest in supporting them. The GIA methods have been a “massive embarrassment for the FIS” and for the Islamist movement. The GIA’s “appalling acts of violence have regularly been cited in the Algerian media as evidence of the barbaric impulses of Islamists in general,” thus making any dialogue with the FIS not feasible.¹⁴⁸ The majority of Algerians, who in 1990s supported the FIS and promises of political and economic reforms, had no desire to bring to power so called utopian radicals, especially once the violence and corruption escalated.

F. SELF-DEFENSE MILITIAS

Bard O’Neil argues that the insurgents’ dependence on terrorism as a way to gain “popular support runs the risk of its prolongation and intensification, which may be counterproductive.” Prolonged acts of terrorism “can disrupt traditional life styles, making life increasingly miserable for the general population.” Failure to replace terrorism with more effective military operations can create the impression that insurgents have lost the initiative and that their chances of success are remote. Even worse, there is a danger that as it continues, terrorism will become indiscriminate. If this occurs, insurgents can end up alienating potential domestic and international supporters.¹⁴⁹ The GIA’s indiscriminate violence generated incentives for collaboration with the regime, thus generating defection instead of deterring it. The GIA suffered defections and decreased popular support because of its indiscriminate actions. As the conflict persisted, people who were initially sympathetic to the GIA’s cause became alienated by GIA atrocities and could no longer endure the material costs of the insurgency. Many stopped giving support; others turned against the movement. After a

¹⁴⁸ Takeyh, “Islamism in Algeria: A Struggle between Hope and Agony.”

¹⁴⁹ Bard E. O’Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: From Revolution to Apocalypse*, (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, Inc., 2005), 103.

few years of sheltering the movement, either willingly or because of coercion, some residents in and around Islamist strongholds agreed to form government-sponsored militias.¹⁵⁰

Kalyvas argues that the local militias or paramilitary groups of patriots “are the answer of incumbents to protracted guerrilla warfare.” Those militias allow regimes “to reduce information costs,” and “to cut warfare costs.” Unfortunately, emergence of militias “almost always cause an escalation of violence.” Local conflicts, personal animosities, family disputes and desire for revenge may induce defection from the insurgents’ groups.¹⁵¹

Martinez believes that the systematical elimination of the MIA and later AIS, and ex-FIS activists, allowed the regime forces to abandon willingly the municipalities previously supporting the FIS, leaving armed groups of GIA that “did not fight in the name of the party, but waged *jihad* in the name of GIA.” The tactics of ‘letting them rot’ allowed isolation of the Greater Algiers communes and transformed those areas into Islamist’s ghettos under the GIA control. Some areas in the interior also remained under the control the GIA. Emirs who had a monopoly of violence there consequently instilled the feeling of insecurity among the population. Thus the army created conditions that forced people “to organize their own defense when they were exasperated by the costs of providing for the ‘Emirs’” of the GIA.¹⁵² Formation of these groups of legitimate defense was a part of the regime’s strategic reorientation of the counterinsurgency campaign. Since the end of 1994, the militias tolerated by the security forces and legalized in 1997 became active participants in anti-guerrilla warfare (their strength was estimated to be around 100,000 men).¹⁵³

Three types of militias appeared during the Algerian civil war that fit a pattern of anti-guerrilla warfare. Firstly, self-defense groups, that were established in Kabylia as a

¹⁵⁰ Hafez, “From Marginalization to Massacres,” 52.

¹⁵¹ Kalyvas, “The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” 266.

¹⁵² Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 150.

¹⁵³ According to the Algerian government, which rejected the word “militia,” they were patriots that joined the security forces and the Commune Guards to defend the people against murder, robbery, and rape.

response to threats from the Islamists. They were “the right arms of political parties and regional associations,” protecting their villages against Islamist bands. These self-defense groups were tolerated but independent from the authority of security forces. There were also private militias created to protect local eminent personalities and their interests. Finally, there were combat type units of patriots, equipped by the government and working with security forces. They consisted mainly “of people threatened by the Islamists, or relatives of victims of the Islamists groups,” and generally operated in the interior to look for the terrorists. Driven by a desire for revenge, those militias were extremely effective; however, they were also accused of many excesses.¹⁵⁴ In addition to guarding their villages from attacks, Kalyvas notices, they became “increasingly involved in full-fledged military operations as auxiliary corps of the army.”¹⁵⁵

Now things have changed, it's no longer the Moudjahidin who cut off heads, it's the militiamen. If the militiamen go on like that, in two or three years they will have killed all the Moudjahidin.¹⁵⁶

The local processes of violence escalation were motivated by revenge: “If they [terrorists] kill one of my relatives I will kill their entire families; this is the only language that terrorists understand.”¹⁵⁷ Kalyvas notices that in Algerian rural areas, these acts of revenge often became a tribal war. Some of the tribe’s members served as soldiers, police officers, or worked for the government - that made tribes connected to the state. Any death of a tribe member, killed by Islamists, caused the spiral of tribal violence. Tribes armed by regime security forces then organized a revenge operation against those who had “children in the guerrilla.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 150-153.

¹⁵⁵ Kalyvas, “The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” 265.

¹⁵⁶ Inhabitant of small village; evidence recorded in France in 1996. In *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, ed. Martinez, 152.

¹⁵⁷ Amnesty International 1997b: 18. In “The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” ed. Kalyvas, 269.

¹⁵⁸ Kalyvas, “The Logic of Massacres in Algeria,” 266.

G. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the implications of the Armed Islamic Group's indiscriminate, large-scale violence and its impact on the Algerian Civil War. This analysis identified several relevant factors regarding the genesis of violence and relations between the GIA armed bands and local population. It specifically considered how and where the GIA originated and the conditions that facilitated its expansion. It also considered its role within local settings, and how these factors were affecting the degrees of GIA violence.

The first section of the chapter demonstrated how political conditions within Algerian society allowed the radical elements to rise to the fore and affect the current settings. The second section explored the nature of the Armed Islamic Group and its increasing violence against civilians as a part of a strategy intended to maximize civilian support and prevent civilian defection. The third section examined the outcomes these acts of violence produced. The most significant result of violence was civilian defection to the regime in a way of creating self-defense and counter insurgency militias. People in Algeria, exhausted by the pointless and ruthless violence, wanted to put an end to it and carry on with their lives. They recognized the longer the violence has gone on, the less it has had to do with the national political objectives of the initiators of the rebellion, and the less it appeared to be oriented by comprehensible political purposes of any kind.¹⁵⁹

This analysis argues that indiscriminate, mass casualty violence against civilians is counterproductive. The GIA atrocities turned popular support dramatically against the Islamic movement and created incentives for collaboration with the regime, thus generating defection instead of deterring it.

¹⁵⁹ Roberts, *The Battlefield Algeria 1998-2002*, 268-269.

III. CASE STUDY: VIOLENCE IN THE WAR IN IRAQ

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the case study of the use of violence by Salafi *jihadists* in the ongoing war in Iraq. More specifically, it will address the most deadly and ruthless terrorist organization among insurgent groups in Iraq: al Qaeda in the land of Two Rivers.

The al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) has claimed responsibility for multiple beheadings, kidnappings, and suicide bombings against foreigners, coalition forces, and the Iraqi police force and army. They have also committed these crimes against many civilians. This group is responsible for an outbreak of violence that started in autumn 2003, which led to the civil war between the Sunni and Shia. Atrocities perpetrated by this group against Sunni civilians were one of the main reasons for the Sunni uprising in the al Anbar province. The Sunni rebellion against AQI, that started in the summer of 2006, has radically improved security in the most violent and hostile province in a “Sunni Triangle” in Iraq—the al Anbar Province. David Kilcullen notices that in Ramadi, Hit, Tikrit, Fallujah, Baquba, Baghdad and other cities and villages “the rate of civilian deaths has dropped precipitously, and overall attacks are down far below historic trends, to almost nothing in some places.” The local Sunni tribes have formed a neighborhood watch (Concerned Local Citizens), have provided security in their own community, and have joined with the Iraqi police under government control and started to cooperate with local Iraqi army units. Kilcullen also believes, the tribal leaders recognized that “the extremists were leading them on a path to destruction, and have seized the opportunity to dump the terrorists” and join the political process to be in charge once U.S. forces leave.¹⁶⁰

The first section of this chapter considers the origins and the position that al Qaeda in Iraq holds among the Sunni insurgency. The second section explores the tactics

¹⁶⁰ David Kilcullen, “Anatomy of Tribal Revolt,” <<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/2007/08/anatomy-of-a-tribal-revolt/>> [Accessed 20 November 2007].

and methods used by this group in its war in Iraq, predominantly against Iraqi civilians. The last section considers the nature of the relationships between al Qaeda and Sunni Iraqis, and how the logic of al Qaeda violence affected the process of the al Anbar Awakening.

B. THE INSURGENCY IN IRAQ

Insurgency in Iraq consists of various groups that have taken up arms against the United States occupation in Iraq and the new Iraqi security forces since April 2003.¹⁶¹ Some intelligence reports estimate the number of these groups from 40 to more than 100. Sharing “a common goal of ending the foreign military presence in Iraq,” these groups, however, “are varied and diverse, with shifting allegiances, configurations, funding sources, strategies and aims.”¹⁶²

Loretta Napoleoni finds insurgency in Iraq as a very “complex force” consisting of “independent Iraqi jihadist groups that gravitate towards al Qaeda, Islamo-nationalist and Ba’ath party resistance fighters opposing Coalition forces, fully armed and active ethnic and religious militias” like Shite Muktada al Sadr “Jaish al Mahdi,” and “an endless stream of foreign suicide bombers.”¹⁶³ Cordesman states that the most important and strong elements of insurgency consisted of former regime elements (Ba’athists) groups as well as extreme Salafis from al Qaeda.¹⁶⁴

The main objective of the Iraqi Sunni insurgency is to force the United States to leave Iraq, replace the current Iraqi government dominated by the Shia (and considered

161 Ahmed S. Hashim, “The Insurgency in Iraq,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (autumn 2003): 2.

162 Human Rights Watch, “A Face and a Name: Civilian Victims of Insurgents Groups in Iraq,” Volume 17, No.9 (E), (October 2005), 13.

163 Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq*, 188.

164 Anthony H. Cordesman and Patrick Baetjer, “The Developing Iraqi Insurgency: Status at the end of 2004,” (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2004), <www.csis.org/features/iraq_devinsergenc.pdf> [Accessed 23 September 2007].

illegitimate because it is backed by the United States), and stop the Shia from coming into power by generating chaos and anarchy.¹⁶⁵

Most importantly, according to Human Rights Watch, the insurgent groups “have different views on the conduct of hostilities and the legitimate targets of military attack. Certain insurgent groups have repeatedly admitted, even boasted, about their role in abductions, executions, attacks on religious or ethnic groups, and suicide bombings in populated areas. Videos they produced of beheadings left no doubt as to their responsibility for the most serious crimes of war. Other groups have concentrated their attacks more on military targets, though they still may be responsible for unlawful attacks against civilians.”¹⁶⁶

Cordesman notices that the insurgents shifted their main effort to Iraqi civilian targets that were more vulnerable and had far more political impact. Much of their activity consists of bombings of soft civilian targets, designed largely to provoke a more intense civil war or halt the development of an effective Iraqi government.¹⁶⁷ The insurgents’ remarkable ability to terrorize residents, killing those who help Coalition forces while intimidating others, is their biggest and most effective weapon.

Different members of the Iraqi population “have different views of the insurgency. Some oppose the insurgency generally, or the way it is being conducted, while others have not joined the insurgency but support its aims. Sunni who criticized the insurgency or have not actively supported it were seen as allied with the new government and thus “risk themselves becoming a target of insurgent groups.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival. How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* (New York, London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 205.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch, “A Face and a Name: Civilian Victims of Insurgents Groups in Iraq,” 13.

¹⁶⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, “Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency: The Nature of Attacks and Patterns and Cycles in the Conflict,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, (3 February, 2006), ii.

¹⁶⁸ Human Rights Watch, “A Face and a Name. Civilian Victims of Insurgents Groups in Iraq,” 13.

C. AL QAEDA IN IRAQ (AQI)

1. AQI Emergence

In April 2003, Iraq became a central front in the Salafi global holy war when Bin Laden called for *jihadis* fighters to join the fight there. Through an underground network that Abu Musab al- Zarqawi established (with indigenous Islamic radicals from Ansar al Sunna), endless streams of foreign fighters started to arrive to Iraq. Created in Afghanistan, Zarqawi's organization Tawhid al Jihad was moved to Iraq following the United States invasion. In July 2003, Tawhid al Jihad began its bloody and indiscriminate attacks through devastating bombings of the Jordanian Embassy and United Nations headquarters in Baghdad, followed by the killing of Shia leader Mohammed Baqr al Hakim and a ruthless campaign of suicide operations against police stations and recruitment centers. Shultz and Dew believes that "Zarqawi's deadly mass attacks ... catapulted him to international notoriety as the mastermind of al Qaeda's Salafi jihad operations in Iraq." On October 17, 2004 in a communiqué issued by Tawhid al Jihad, Zarqawi announced that his movement joined together under the banner of Al Qaeda in a pledge of allegiance. He was appointed by Osama Bin Laden as Emir of Al Qaeda in the country of Two Rivers "to carry out Jihad in the name of God."¹⁶⁹

Among Sunni insurgent groups, al Qaeda has played a leading role in terrorist activities in Iraq; however, Brian Fishman argues, it was never "the center of gravity of the Iraqi insurgency" and Al Zarqawi did not control the insurgency in Iraq. Foreign fighters have been a very small minority of the entire resistance.¹⁷⁰ Andrew Tilgman states that "Even if the manpower and number of attacks attributed to AQI have been exaggerated ... many observers argue that what is uniquely dangerous about the group is not its numbers, but the spectacular nature of its strikes. While homegrown Sunni and Shiite militias engage for the most part in tit-for-tat violence to forward sectarian ends,

¹⁶⁹ Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists and Militias: The Warriors of Contemporary Combat* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 237-238.

¹⁷⁰ Brian Fishman. "After Zarqawi: The Dilemmas and Future of Al Qaeda in Iraq." *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, no. 4 (autumn 2006): 30.

AQI's methods are presumed to be different - more dramatic, more provocative, and having a greater ripple effect on the country's fragile political environment," and have "the most destabilizing political and strategic affects."¹⁷¹ According to United States intelligence assessments, AQI "may not account for most of the violence in Iraq, but it is the organization responsible for the highest profile attacks, which serve as a primary accelerant to the underlying sectarian conflict."¹⁷²

Al Zarqawi's death didn't change much in the way of al Qaeda activity in Iraq. Abdallah bin Rashid al-Baghdadi, the emir of the Mujahidin Shura Council, restated his determination to continue Zarqawi's jihad against Iraq's Shia. Fishman notices that "The increase of sectarian violence in Iraq since Zarqawi's death" reinforced this tendency.¹⁷³

Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia remained the leading jihadist group and continued its campaign to divide Iraq along sectarian borders and established a stronghold within Sunni area. It built alliances with smaller factions and merged with various organizations to "present itself as an Iraqi, rather than foreign organization." Al Qaeda jihadists build their support base on the growing popularity of the puritanical Salafi strain of Islam and escalated inner Sunni rivalries. *Jihadis* presented themselves as the defenders of persecuted Sunnis and seemed "ideologically better placed to defend Sunni Arabs against hostile [Shia] militias, than their more moderate nationalist rivals."¹⁷⁴

2. AQI Objectives

Carter Malkasian argues that *jihadis* from the al Qaeda Organization in the Land of Two Rivers "sought to compel a U.S. withdrawal; but only as a means of creating an anarchical environment conducive to supporting terrorist activity in the region," and extend the jihad to the secular states bordering with Iraq. Finally, "they hoped to establish

¹⁷¹ Andrew Tilghman, "The Myth of AQI," (October 2007), 9
<<http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2007/0710.tilghman.html>> [Accessed 30 November 2007].

¹⁷² Anthony H. Cordesman, "Iraq's Sunni Insurgents: Looking Beyond Al Qa'ida," Center for Strategic and International Studies, Arleigh A. Burke Chair of Strategy, Working Draft, (16 July 2007), 2.

¹⁷³ Fishman, "After Zarqawi," 25.

¹⁷⁴ "Iraq's Escalating Insurgency," Jane's Terrorism & Security Monitor, 17 January 2007,
<www.janes.com> [Accessed 29 April 2007].

a new Islamic Caliphate” with borders reaching far beyond Mesopotamia. In order to achieve these goals and to be successful, *jihadis* had to control the Iraqi population through either support or coercion.¹⁷⁵ Based in the Sunni tribal areas, AQI was able “to sustain spectacular anti-Shi’ite bombing campaign, which, along with the Sunnis’ historic disdain for the Shi’ite majority, created the conditions for the … civil war.”¹⁷⁶ Kilcullen believes that al Qaeda’s “‘pitch’ to the Sunni community is based on the argument that only al Qa’ida stands between the Sunnis and a Shi’a-led genocide.” The sectarian aspect used by AQI that “promotes a belief by Sunnis that they will be permanent victims in the new Iraq is one of the most significant drivers of violence. This belief creates space for terrorist groups including AQI, and these groups in turn drive a cycle of sectarian violence that keeps Iraq unstable and prevents U.S. disengaging.”¹⁷⁷

“In spite of ideological differences, al Qaeda’s jihadists and Sunni resistance generally cooperated against the Coalition occupation.”¹⁷⁸ *Jihadis* rejected, however, any compromise with the Coalition or the Iraqi government; moreover, their goal to found a religious Islamic state that might export terrorism evidently threatened the United States’ national security.

3. AQI Tactics

a. Violence

To maintain control over the population, intimidate opponents and create a constant climate of violence and chaos, AQI’s *takfiris* used terror as a necessary part of insurgent campaign to gain popular support.¹⁷⁹ Thus the *jihadis* carried out brutal terrorist attacks on the Iraqis. Abu Musab al Zarqawi launched a series of attacks on the

¹⁷⁵ Carter Malkasian, “Signaling Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (June 2006), 429.

¹⁷⁶ Joe Klein, “Is al-Qaeda on the Run in Iraq?” *Time*, 23 May 2007,
<<http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,162469700.html>> [Accessed 15 November 2007].

¹⁷⁷ Kilcullen, “Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt.”

¹⁷⁸ Malkasian, “Signaling Resolve, Democratization, and the First Battle of Fallujah,” 429.

¹⁷⁹ O’Neill, *Insurgency & Terrorism*, 103.

Shia leadership, holy Shia sites, and wider Shia population. Bruce Riedel argues that Al Zarqawi's action was a part of a considered strategy planned before the invasion. Targeting Shias isolated and exposed U.S. forces to attack. Zarqawi "wanted the arena to be cleared of any rival before the American army withdraws from Iraq so the Mujahideens would gain mastery over Iraq, set up Sharia courts, suppress heresy and all the things that are repudiated by Islam."¹⁸⁰ To disrupt the election scheduled for January 30, 2005 "Zarqawi declared war on the election and democracy itself, promising a 'fierce war' against all 'apostates' who vote in the election. Moreover, he declared a bitter war against democracy and all those who seek to enact it."¹⁸¹

Some chieftains of Sunni tribes believe that AQI used Iraq and the Iraqis as a means to achieve their goals.¹⁸² The organization knew the U.S. would leave eventually, but AQI ultimately must fight Iraqis and destroy Iraqi institutions in order to prevail. Indiscriminate and large scale use of violence against civilian Iraqis, however, "may be the source of their own [al Qaeda in Iraq] demise."¹⁸³ It alienated the majority of the Iraqi population and, most importantly, caused opposition to the AQI's tactic among the foreign support base. An open letter, published by Kuwaiti Sheikh Wali al Tabtabai (variously described as an Islamist, Salafist and conservative) in the Kuwaiti newspaper Al Watan on 27 September 2007 gave the opinion of a significant section of Muslims on AQI's terrorist actions:

Al-Qaeda's shameful operations [in Iraq] violated the genuine concept of Jihad and overstepped its real significance, since they were aimed at kidnappings, manslaughters, bombings in public places and at targeting mosques and innocent Sunnis and Shias.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Bruce Riedel, "Al Qaeda Strikes Back," *New York Times* (7 May 2007), <http://www.nytimes.com/cfr/world/20070501faessay_v86n3_riedel.html> [Accessed 23 May 2007].

¹⁸¹ Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias*, 245.

¹⁸² Open Source Center, Al-Iraqiyah Interviews Iraqi Researcher, Chieftains on Al-Muhajir's Speech, 29 September 2006.

¹⁸³ Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias*, 256.

¹⁸⁴ "JTIC Briefing: Bin Laden Says Mistakes Made in Iraq," Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Centre, 25 October 2007, <www.janes.com> [Accessed 29 November 2007].

b. Mass Casualties Suicide Missions

Mike Davis argues that suicide car bombings have been one of the AQI's most preferable tactics that still "continue to devastate Shia and Sunni neighborhoods." The *jihadis* "stroked savagely, and at will, against Shiite areas of Baghdad and Shiite pilgrims on the highways to the south of the capital," as well as against dissident Sunni tribes in al Anbar province. They even used "children as a decoy to get through a military checkpoint and then exploded the car with the kids still at the back seats." Some of those suicide car bombers attacks were coordinated with assailants in suicide vests. An estimated 78,000 Iraqis were killed by several thousand vehicle bombings between March 2003 and June 2006, and these numbers continue to grow.¹⁸⁵ Robert Pape believes that the tactic of suicide bombings, which al Qaeda constantly uses against civilians, is "rational in that it helps Islamic terrorist groups achieve their goals."¹⁸⁶

The Al Qaeda terror campaign in Iraq centered mostly on suicide missions. Napoleoni reveals that Ayman al Zawahiri, the al Qaeda main ideologue, "merged the concepts of martyrdom and suicide into a terrorist technique" in the late 1980s. Suicide missions play the role of tactical deception in the jihad struggle. Killing infidels is not a murder; it is a path to heaven. However, the legitimacy of suicide missions is a source of great debate in the Muslim world, especially when innocent Muslims become victims. To explain the killings of hundreds of innocents Muslims, women and children, al Zawahiri and al Zarqawi used the same concept of "priority for jihad." Slaughtering of fellow people is necessary, justified and permitted in pursuit of jihad. To justify the random killings of innocent Iraqis in a wave of suicide attacks, Muslim victims were treated also as martyrs.¹⁸⁷

Al Zarqawi started the campaign of indiscriminate suicide car bombings, that mainly affected Iraqi civilians (mostly Shia), because this type of campaign was

¹⁸⁵ Mike Davis, "Car Bombs: WMDs the Surge Can't Stop," *The Nation*, (30 March 2007), <<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070416/davis>> [Accessed 12 November 2007].

¹⁸⁶ Robert A. Pape, "The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (August 2003): 246.

¹⁸⁷ Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq*, 82-83.

cheaper than selective violence. The majority of suicide bombers were made up mostly of foreigners, who came to Iraq to “join the fight and to ultimately meet their end as human explosives.” Most of these volunteers “have no military training or guerilla experience, nor even used a weapon.”¹⁸⁸ Tactically, this strategy aimed to maximize their usefulness. Mohammad Hafez believes, Zarqawi understood that “it is less expensive to recruit and prepare suicide bombers than guerrilla fighter who must be armed and sheltered over an extended period of time. Human bombs conduct their missions with greater versatility and accuracy,” and their “psychological impact is much more potent on the target audience,” highlighting “the determination of the insurgents” that are “not deterred by death.”¹⁸⁹ In Iraq, al Qaeda had no time and infrastructure to train them, and the best possible option to use them was to “make them blow themselves up in the crowded area.” They were treated by al Qaeda as a weapon, not as people or *jihadis*.¹⁹⁰ More importantly, *Jihadis* in Iraq that killed indiscriminately “in pursuit for a better government for [the] Iraqi population” have seen themselves as *mujahedins* or martyrs, not terrorists.¹⁹¹

The issue of innocent Muslims that became victims of *jihadis*' indiscriminate terror of car bombings, however, alienated support for Islamist armed groups in Iraq, as well as across the Muslim world. Many condemned suicide missions because they ended up killing fellow Muslims.

c. Mass Atrocities

Cordesman finds that al Qaeda in Iraq noticed that “atrocities like desecrating corpses and beheadings were effective political and psychological weapons.” Even if the result of this tactic provoked hostility and anger, AQI deliberately used it to “create conditions that can drive the West away, undermine secular and moderate

¹⁸⁸ Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq*, 186.

¹⁸⁹ Mohammed M. Hafez, “Rationality, Culture, and Structure in the Making of Suicide Bombers: A Preliminary Theoretical Synthesis and Illustrative Case Study,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, Vol. 29, No. 2, (2006), 168.

¹⁹⁰ Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq*, 186.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 82-87.

regimes in the Arab and Islamic world, and create the conditions under which they can create ‘Islamic’ states.” The “more horrifying” attacks were better for the cause, because they got more media attention. Killing innocent hostages, causing mass casualties through bombings in crowds, “desecrating corpses, beheading people, and similar acts of violence” grabbed the greater attention of the world media.¹⁹²

Michael Totten, visiting Sunni Iraqis in ar Ramadi, the capital of al Anbar Province, noticed that the citizens in Ramadi were terribly scared of Al Qaeda. For any kind of misbehavior AQI “would show up at their houses in the middle of the night, rape women” in front of their husbands, kill children, and forbid them to help the Americans.¹⁹³ Toten notices that “AQI killed civilians by castrating them, stuffing their genitals in their mouths, and cutting off their heads.” In response to one of the Sunni sheikh’s (Jassim) open cooperation with U.S. forces, al Qaeda “launched a massive attack on his area.” *Jihadis* “set houses on fire” and “dragged people through the streets behind pickup trucks.” What is more, they kidnapped and tortured children. Finally, “after several young people were beheaded by al Qaeda,” the imams from mosques in Ramadi screamed jihad against al Qaeda and started to fight *jihadis*.

Toten notices that after a time al Qaeda met resistance from the Iraqis who “rose up and began killing the terrorists on their own.” People “reached the tipping point where they just could not take any more.”¹⁹⁴ Citizens of Ramadi formed “an alliance with the previously detested United States Army and Marine Corps and purged the terrorists from their lands.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Cordesman, “Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency: The Nature of Attacks and Patterns and Cycles in the Conflict,” 14.

¹⁹³ Michael J. Totten, “Anbar Awakens Part II: Hell is Over,” *Middle East Journal* (18 September 2007), <<http://www.michaeltotten.com/archives/001517.html>> [Accessed 19 November 2007].

¹⁹⁴ Michael J. Totten, “Anbar Awakens Part I: The Battle of Ramadi,” *Middle East Journal*, 10 September 2007,” <<http://www.michaeltotten.com/archives/001514.html>> [Accessed 19 November 2007].

¹⁹⁵ Totten, “Anbar Awakens Part II: Hell is Over.”

d. Kidnapping

In May 2004, Abu Musab al Zarqawi and his Islamist group started a series of brutal executions of hostages by beheading them, which became a common method of AQI. Jason Burke points out that even though Zarqawis' actions "seemed to be psychotic ... there was method to his madness." He was "deliberately trying to shock his audience" by executing hostages in a way of a "ritualized slaughter," videotaping it, and then showing it to the public through the internet or TV. Using camcorders and the internet, Burke argues that Zarqawi "mounted an international media event at the tactical level that had tremendous strategic impact." Al Zarqawi hoped to strike fear into the Iraqi populace and weaken the resolve of those who might support the Coalition forces in Iraq. This terrorists' action also had tremendous cultural and symbolic significance for the audience. "Al Zarqawi ... understood that violence affects not just victims, but witnesses too." The target audience "for this statement was not the European and American publics, coalition forces or international workers but the millions of Muslims."¹⁹⁶ Napoleoni believes that kidnapping and beheading hostages was one of many strategies designated to build Zarqawi's status in Iraq.¹⁹⁷

Fishman writes that Abu Musab al Zarqawi "used public statements released online to convey determination, ideological fervor, and strategic purpose to followers, enemies, and pole-sitters. These statements provided strategic context for al AIQ's attacks, which might otherwise be perceived as simple acts of sadism rather than military instruments designed to achieve specific outcomes."¹⁹⁸

e. Imposing Sharia

In the areas that al Qaeda took control of, still other civilians were targeted for engaging in what the AQI considered un-Islamic behaviors. *Jihadis* did not allow people to cut their hair, "forced men to grow beards," forbid smoking and "broke

¹⁹⁶Jason Burke, Foreword in Loretta Napoleoni. *Insurgent Iraq: Al Zarqawi and the New Generation*. (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2005), 8-10.

¹⁹⁷ Napoleoni, *Insurgent Iraq*, 172.

¹⁹⁸ Fishman, "After Zarqawi," 27.

people's fingers if they were seen smoking a cigarette," prohibited girls to attend school, and what is more, "dragged people outside the city and shot them in the head" for any misbehavior. Toten believes, "Once they [*jihadis*] started acting like that AQI could only establish a safe haven by using terrorism against the local civilians."¹⁹⁹ One of the Iraqi resistance groups, the Islamic Army in Iraq, "criticized Abu-Umar al-Baghdadi, the amir of the state of Iraq [the umbrella for al Qaeda in Mesopotamia], for 'banning the [satellite] dish and for ordering the woman to wear the veil,' making this 'one of the 19 constants,' since the conditions through which the country was going made the veiled woman subject to arrest and this prompted the sisters to give up the veil in places where they face such tribulations."²⁰⁰

The imposition of a strict interpretation of Islamic law and code of conduct, however, occurred to be counter-productive and ended up alienating the Sunni population from *jihadis*.

4. AQI's Mobilizing Structures and Support

To maintain effective operations, al Qaeda *jihadis* required the support of all the local resistance groups, including secular nationalist and tribal members. The whole spectrum of the Sunni insurgency supported foreign fighters, offering them protection, concealment, and the necessary resources to carry out attacks. The relatively small group of foreign *jihadis* played an important role inside the Sunni insurgency because they were willing to carry out suicide operations that the Sunni were not.

Jeffrey White concludes, "Although AQI began as an essentially foreign jihadist organization, it started cooperating early with former regime elements (FREs)" and "became more Iraqi over time." Zarqawi's "presence in the country before the regime fell made this process easier, even though ideological differences between the two groups were, and remain, significant." After a while, "operating under the cover of Sunni Arab population," "AQI came to cooperate with a wide range of other insurgent elements,

¹⁹⁹ Totten, "Anbar Awakens Part I: The Battle of Ramadi."

²⁰⁰ "Iraq's Sunni Armed Groups Reportedly Planning Alliance Against Al-Qa'ida," *London Al-Hayah in Arabic*, Open Source Center, 11 April 2007.

sharing resources and participating in joint operations.” This cooperation “expanded the resources available to AQI, legitimized its presence, and increased its significance as an insurgent group.”²⁰¹

Zarqawi also received a lot of support from Iraq’s border countries. Some groups, like al Qaeda in Saudi Arabia, declared their willingness to send fighters and suicide bombers whenever Zarqawi needed them: “We have hundreds of jihadis prepared to die for the cause and many tons of explosives. You will find in us the strongest support you will need to force others to come to a better understanding of the world ‘terror.’ For us it translates as ‘victory.’”²⁰² Fishman argues that al Qaeda in Iraq increased “group solidarity through shared participation in brutal acts” and used “both ideological and operational participation in such behavior as a means of vetting members.”²⁰³

Over time, because of the brutal attacks on Sunnis and pointless atrocities perpetrated by *jihadis*, AQI lost support and alienated itself from the Sunni population. White believes that as a foreign network operating in Iraq, AQI did not adapt properly to the Iraqi environment and had to fight for its own survival.²⁰⁴ More importantly, the mixture of religions, culture, and traditions which exist in Iraq, as well as the experience that Iraqis shared together, made it difficult to increase support for al Qaeda terrorists.²⁰⁵

5. AQI Targets and Reasons for Attacking Civilians

The Iraqi Body Count registered 47,668 civilian deaths related to violence between March 2003 and June 2006. However, the accurate number of civilians killed in Iraq is unknown and different agencies published different numbers of victims.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Jeffrey White, “An Adaptive Insurgency: Confronting Adversary Networks in Iraq,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Focus, No. 58, (September 2006), 8.

²⁰² Zaki Chehab, *Inside the Resistance: The Iraqi Insurgency and the Future of the Middle East* (New York: Nation Books, 2005), 51.

²⁰³ Fishman, “After Zarqawi,” 25.

²⁰⁴ White, “An Adaptive Insurgency: Confronting Adversary Networks in Iraq,” 17.

²⁰⁵ Chehab, *Inside the Resistance*, 166.

²⁰⁶ Iraq Family Health Study Group, “Violence-Related Mortality in Iraq since 2002 to 2006,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, (9 January 2008), <www.nejm.org> 492. [Accessed 2 December 2007].

The strategic reasons for targeting civilians is that, finding it difficult to beat U.S. and Iraqi Government forces in open fighting, *jihadis* target civilians in order to impose extra cost on the coalition and Iraqi authorities. AQI's violence against civilians was aimed at creating fear among the population, which in the long run conflict would create problems for the occupying Coalition forces and new Iraqi government in sustaining control.²⁰⁷

Like other terrorist groups, AQI (by targeting civilians) hoped to “pressure the regime into concession or relaxation of coercive control by spreading insecurity to the extreme and making the country ungovernable.”²⁰⁸ The organization claimed that its attacks against civilians had to “achieve various aims, including pressuring foreign governments, discouraging Iraqis from supporting the current government and punishing perceived wrongs.” According to the AQI statements, “as well as media reports and the views of insurgency experts in Iraq and abroad,” AQI, by attacking civilians, is determined “to accomplish the following goals:

- Punish individuals for collaboration. Attacks on Iraqi translators, drivers, contractors and others who work with foreign governments often are aimed at punishing them for their collaboration and warning others to avoid such work.
- Punish groups for collaboration or claims to political power. Attacks on Iraq’s religious and ethnic communities – Shi’ite Muslims, Kurds and Christians - are collective punishment for perceived cooperation with foreign forces and, in the case of Shi’ite Muslims and Kurds, their assertions of national power.
- Pressure foreign governments to leave Iraq. The abductions and killings of foreign civilians often are accompanied by a demand for the removal of a specific country’s military from Iraq.

²⁰⁷ Cordesman, “Iraq’s Evolving Insurgency: The Nature of Attacks and Patterns and Cycles in the Conflict,” ii.

²⁰⁸ Marta Crenshaw, “The Logic of Terrorism: Terrorist Behavior as a Product of Strategic Choice,” in Walter Reich, ed., *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1998), 18.

- Undermine the Iraqi government. Attacks on Iraqi politicians and government officials send the message that Iraqis who participate in the new government risk death and the lives of their families.
- Instill fear in the civilian population. Attacks also may aim to induce Iraqis who support the new government to lose faith in the ability of the government and the Coalition forces to provide security.
- Divert resources from military tasks. Attacks on civilians and civilian objects force the Iraqi government and Multi-National Force to divert resources to protect reconstruction projects, infrastructure facilities, humanitarian organizations and other so-called ‘soft targets.’
- Impede reconstruction. Attacks on Iraqi and foreign reconstruction contractors, as well as on oil pipelines, electrical grids and water stations, impede the country’s reconstruction and send a message that the new Iraqi authorities cannot provide for the public’s needs.
- Provoke a heavy-handed response. Attacks on civilians and civilian objects may goad multinational and Iraqi forces into a heavy-handed response in which civilians are killed or civilian infrastructure is destroyed. Such attacks might alienate the population and help win insurgent groups sympathizers and recruits.
- Gain the release of detainees. Insurgent groups have used abducted civilians to demand the release of persons from detention facilities in Iraq.”²⁰⁹

Al Qaeda’s unwillingness to adequately distinguish between civilians and combatants was having a devastating impact on the civilians of Iraq.

6. AQI War on Shia

The anti-Shia aim of the suicide attacks, masterminded by al Zarqawi, have created a wedge between the Shias and the Sunnis, a factor, Napoleoni believes, that “prevented the formation of a united Iraqi front, based on secular and nationalist

²⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, “A Face and a Name: Civilian Victims of Insurgents Groups in Iraq,” Volume 17, No .9 (E), (October 2005), 19-20.

objectives,” against the United States occupation. Zarqawi knew that if Shia and Sunni would eventually unite against the United States, foreign jihadists would be “cut out.” To avoid any cooperation and alliance between these two groups, al Zarqawi targeted Shia. He wanted to start a civil war to “weaken the Shia position and force the United States to leave Iraq without a positive political outcome,” and tear apart Iraq to create a new, Sunni state. Zarqawi declared “full-scale war on Shiites all over Iraq, whenever and wherever they are found,” and launched a campaign of suicide bombings and assassinations, killing and maiming thousands of Shias.²¹⁰

Napoleoni argues that Abu Musab al-Zarqawi put religion front and center in the conflict. He merged together Sunni political concerns in postwar Iraq, the legacy of the Shia–Sunni rivalry over the centuries, and the future of Islam and Sunnis in Iraq. Al Zarqawi accused secular and moderate Iraqi Muslim, as well as Shia, of apostasy. He characterized Shia as heretics and blamed them for the support they had given to the Coalition forces occupying Iraq. Accusation of apostasy leads to removal from the system of social rights and privileges and from the economy, thus it is a powerful political weapon.²¹¹

Nasr reveals that the suicide bombings “of market places, police stations, mosques, and open-air religious gatherings occurred almost daily, generating a tale of sorrow and rage that would tear Shias and Sunnis apart.” In addition, hundreds more ordinary Shias were murdered in what has appeared to be random violence. Some were shot at home or in the streets. The daily atrocities disrupted Shia lives and turned “their commemoration of the death of their imams into a new occasion for mourning.” They also underlined the inability of the Iraqi government to contend with the violence, and even more, the extent to which the al Qaeda had succeeded in instilling fear in Shias’ hearts and minds. “Anger and prejudice were rising on both sides of the sectarian divide.” Despite calls for calm, the violence continued to rage, exposing the deep sectarian splits that were shaping Shia identity and politics.²¹²

²¹⁰ Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 207.

²¹¹ Ibid., 56-58.

²¹² Ibid., 197.

These actions were designated to intimidate the Shia and undermine their confidence that they would not be able to rule Iraq without Sunni cooperation. Through these vicious attacks, AQI wanted to show the Shia that it could keep the violence ongoing; and that the United States, as well as the Shia's chosen government and their "venerated religious leaders" were weak and unable to provide security. Nasr believes that "this strategy required attacking the country's infrastructure, along with international agencies and humanitarian groups, to weaken the government and prevent it from providing basic services to the population."²¹³

Fishman believes that *Jihadis'* policy had also a wider "strategic purpose of building popular support for Zarqawi in the Sunni areas of Iraq and neighboring states, without moderating the ideological extremism."²¹⁴ These acts of ridiculous violence influenced the Shia directly, but were insufficient to support AQI's international cause. Daily massacres of innocent Shias ignited sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni, and most importantly, provoked Shia retaliation in the way of death squads perpetrating mass ethnic cleansing operations on Sunni Iraqis. Fawaz Gerges notices that many Arab and Muslim states demanded al Qaeda "to put an end to terrorism in Iraq and to punish Zarqawi and his men for killing civilians, which violates Islamic precepts." Other Islamist organization like the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Islamic Group "strongly criticized Zarqawi for killing civilians ...and accused his organization of trying to 'annihilate' the Shiites, not to 'liberate' Iraq."²¹⁵

D. SUNNI UPRISING AGAINST AL QAEDA

1. Reasons for Sunni Rebellion

Sunni opposition to the al Qaeda presence was aroused in 2004 when Sunni nationalist insurgent groups "fought with jihadist cells for local dominance," and this

²¹³ Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 201-203.

²¹⁴ Fishman, "After Zarqawi," 23.

²¹⁵ Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad went Global*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261.

dynamic continued to increase. Some Sunni tribes, tired of al Qaeda atrocities and intimidations against Sunni civilians (who were housing foreign fighters), formed the Al Anbar Awakening Council “to combat the threat from al Qaeda and its allies,” and to expel the extremists from their territories.²¹⁶ The establishment of the Islamic State, an umbrella for al Qaeda, “was the reason of creation the Coordination Bureau with a view to uniting the efforts of the moderate national Islamic resistance” to liberate Iraq from foreign occupiers and to isolate al Qaeda and extremist *jihadis* “trading with the blood of Muslims.”²¹⁷

In autumn 1996 the tribal leaders in the province, including some who previously were against the Americans, formed a movement to reject the savagery al Qaeda had brought to their region. Al Anbar tribes signed the “Awakening of Al-Anbar” honor pact (*Sahawa al Anbar*), which sought to eliminate all forms of armed acts and protect the highway connecting Baghdad, Jordan, and Syria. A local administrative council was set up under the chairmanship of Shaykh Abd-al-Sattar al-Muzay (al Qaeda murdered his father and three of his brothers) and the membership of representatives of 11 Al-Anbar tribes. According to the pact, each tribe had to “recruit a force of 1,000 volunteers” who would be “responsible for the protection of a certain part of the highway.” In addition “to bringing sectarian killings to an end,” the armed tribal militias were “expected to face up to takfiri [those who hold other Muslims to be infidels] killers, murders, and lootings against passengers traveling to or from Jordan and Syria.” The Anbar Awakening pact “also included the termination of all armed acts and the chasing of takfiris” who were responsible “for the deteriorating security conditions in the province.”²¹⁸

Michael Eisenstadt believes that several factors accounted for the Anbar Awakening and Sunni sheikhs’ sudden change of their front and turning against al Qaeda’s jihadists. These reasons include “popular revulsion against the ideology and

²¹⁶ Jane’s Terrorism & Security Monitor, “Iraq’s Escalating Insurgency,” (17 January 2007), <www.janes.com> [Accessed 29 April 2007].

²¹⁷ Jane’s Terrorism & Security Monitor, “Iraq Insurgent Unity Collapse,” (27 April 2007), <www.janes.com> [Accessed 29 April 2007].

²¹⁸ Al-Fayha: Al-Anbar Tribes Agree To Form Forces To Fight ‘Takfiris’” Dubai Al-Fayha Television, Open Source Center, (24 September 2006).

methods of AQI, the threat that AQI poses to the autonomy of the tribes and their way of life, and the damage that AQI has done to the local economy.”²¹⁹

The tribal leaders in Anbar Province began to turn to the government and against extremists from al Qaeda in summer 2006, “largely due to unspeakable atrocities committed by the terrorists against their own hosts.”²²⁰ Even though Sunni insurgent groups “had no love for the Iraqi government, certain Sunni sheiks, imams, and former military officers were upset with AQI’s heavy-handed and brutally violent tactics and domination of the black market. Sunnis particularly disliked foreign fighters, who were often affiliated with AQI.” Malkasian argues that “This rivalry compelled these Sunni leaders to back the formation of locally based police forces, which, in contrast to the army, provided them a legitimate avenue to secure their own territory and power.”²²¹

The chairman of the Al-Anbar Salvation Council, Sheikh Ali al-Hatim al-Ali al-Sulayman, acknowledged that the Council was fighting against al Qaeda for these reasons: the organization “was targeting Iraqi civilians, destroyed the infrastructure, killed children, displaced families, and forced people out of their homes. The governorate was completely destroyed as a result of the recklessness of the *takfiris* and the U.S. forces.”²²²

Toten notices that some of the Sunni sheiks “were enormously unhappy with the American presence since fighting exploded in the province’s second largest city of Fallujah, but al Qaeda proved to be even more sinister.” *Jihadis* of AQI “were militarily incapable of expelling the American Army and Marines” and they proved to be “worse oppressors than even Saddam Hussein. The leaders of Anbar Province saw little choice

²¹⁹ Michael Eisenstadt, “Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lesson Learned,” *Military Review*, (September-October 2007), 25 <<http://usacac.leavenworth.army.mil/CAC/milreview/English/SepOct07/eisenstadtengseptoct07.pdf>> [Accessed 12 November 2007].

²²⁰ Frederick W. Kagan, “The Gettysburg of this War,” *National Review Online*, (3 September 2007), <<http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=MGM2YWI4ODI0MDA1ZjczOTFjNDNkMGQzMzM0MGQ4Mjg>> [Accessed 23 November 2007].

²²¹ Carter Malkasian, “A Thin Blue Line in the Sand,” *Democracy: Journal of Ideas*, Issue No. 5, (Summer 2007), 54. <<http://www.democracyjournal.org>> [Accessed 10 October 2007].

²²² “Al-Arabiyah TV Interviews Head of AL-Anbar Salvation Council, Insurgency Key Figures,” Dubai Al-Arabiyah Television in Arabic, Open Source Center (4 May 2007).

but to openly declare them enemies and do whatever it took to wipe them out.” “By April of 2007, every single tribal leader in all of Anbar province was cooperating with the Americans.”²²³ In response to *Sahawa al Anbar*, al Qaeda proclaimed the Islamic State of Iraq and declared Ramadi “The Capital of the Islamic State of Iraq” on October 15, 2006. AQI was “threatened by the tribal movement,” so the terrorist groups “accelerated their attacks against tribal leaders. They ramped up the murder and intimidation.” AQI tried to retake Ramadi but it failed. In acts of revenge, *jihadis* destroyed a couple bridges in al Anbar Province, and started the assassination campaign, killing “off-duty police and members of their tribes almost daily, including the sheik of one of the key tribes.”²²⁴ AQI militants killed a Sheikh and held his body for four days, then executed young people in public, and attacked the compound of another sheikh.²²⁵

According to intelligence reports, AQI maintained its presence throughout the province, even in the summer of 2007, and was “the dominant organization of influence in Al Anbar, surpassing the nationalist insurgents, the Iraqi Government, and the MNF [the coalition] in its ability to control the day-to-day life of the average Sunni.”²²⁶

In September 2007, Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha, the leader of the indigenous Anbar Salvation Council that declared Al Qaeda the enemy, “was killed in a bomb attack ... near his desert compound.” He was “the sixth tribal leader to be killed since May 2007.” That murder, however, did not affect the changes in the hearts and minds of the locals. Assassinating a well-respected leader who was widely seen as a savior would only further harden Anbaris against the rough men who had ruled them.²²⁷

²²³ Totten, “Anbar Awakens Part I: The Battle of Ramadi.”

²²⁴ Carter Malkasian, “A Thin Blue Line in the Sand,” 56.

²²⁵ Sean Mcfarlan, ”Iraq: A Profil of Iraq’s Anbar Province,” NPR, Talk of the Nation, 20 September 2007, <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14566803&sc=emaf>> [Accessed 21 November 2007].

²²⁶ Malkasian, “A Thin Blue Line in the Sand,” 51.

²²⁷ Alissa J. Rubbin, “Sunni Sheik Who Backed U.S. in Iraq Is Killed,” The New York Times, (4 September 2007).

2. The Strength of the Tribal System in Iraq

Eisendstadt believes that “The enduring strength of the tribes in many of Iraq’s rural areas and some of its urban neighborhoods” was the “key to efforts to drive a wedge between tribally based Sunni Arab insurgents and Al-Qaeda in Iraq in Anbar province and elsewhere, as well as efforts to undermine popular support for the Mahdi Army in largely Shi’te neighborhoods and regions of the country.”²²⁸ “For centuries the social and political organization of many Iraqi Arabs has centered on the tribe.”²²⁹ Sunni tribes were provided with political, economic, and educational benefits for their support to help rule over the territory. “Aligning with tribal sheikhs became a political necessity to control over large parts of Iraq.”²³⁰

Kilcullen argues that Sunni tribes in Iraq “are not somehow separate, out in the desert, or remote: rather, they are powerful interest groups that permeate Iraqi society. More than 85% of Iraqis claim some form of tribal affiliation; tribal identity is a parallel, informal but powerful sphere of influence in the community. Iraqi tribal leaders represent a competing power center, and the tribes themselves are a parallel hierarchy that overlaps with formal government structures and political allegiances.” The Iraqi national character is very complex, and “tribal identity plays an extremely important part in it, even for urbanized Iraqis. Thus the tribal revolt is not some remote riot on a reservation: it’s a major social movement that could significantly influence most Iraqis where they live.”²³¹

3. Forced Marriages

The Sunni sheiks argue that the split started over women and that it was the spark that ignited the tribes rise against al Qaeda. Al Qaeda fighters “who were initially honored as allies, who led the resistance from the front and paid well, had outstayed their welcome. Many of the foreigners tried to enforce the strict rules of the Wahhabi strand of

²²⁸ Eisenstadt, “Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lesson Learned,” 16.

²²⁹ Hussein D. Hassan, “Iraq: Tribal Structure, Social, and Political Activities,” CRS Report for Congress, (15 March 2007).

²³⁰ Shultz and Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists, and Militias*, 202.

²³¹ Kilcullen, “Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt.”

Islam: locals were tortured for ‘un-Islamic’ behavior – punished for smoking, drinking and possessing photographs and films. The tipping point ... [came] when Al-Qaeda fighters began forcibly taking sheikhs’ daughters for their wives, perverting a tribal tradition of forging alliances through marriage.”²³² This standard al Qaeda method of cementing alliances through marriage broke “The alliance of convenience and mutual exploitation” between AQI and Sunni tribes, for whom “tribal custom” was “at least as important as religion.”²³³

Al Qaeda has adopted the strategy of forced marriages as a method of creating ties with local populations. Through marriage of “al Qaeda leaders and key operatives to women from prominent tribal families,” AQI wanted to create a “bond with the community,” make use of “kinship-based alliances,” and set the “AQ network into the society” to “manipulate local people” over time. Unfortunately for AQ, forced marriages outside the tribe have never been culturally accepted in traditional Iraqi society, and tribal leaders resisted demands for such marriages. Al Qaeda, “with their hyper-reductionists version of ‘Islam’ stripped of cultural content, discounted the tribes’ view as ignorant, stupid and sinful” and retaliated with violence. “AQI killed a sheikh over his refusal to give daughters of his tribe to them in marriage, which created revenge obligation ... on his people, who attacked AQI. The terrorists retaliated with immense brutality, killing the children of a prominent sheikh in a particularly gruesome manner” For Anbaris it “was the last straw,” that led to the tribes’ rebellion. “Neighboring clans joined the fight, which escalated as AQI ... tried to crush the revolt through more atrocities.” The rebellion spread “along kinship lines through Anbar and into neighboring provinces.”²³⁴

In Iraq, the al Qaeda strategy of forcing marriages backfired, in part because the radical Islamist movement failed to appreciate Iraq’s brand of Islam, tribal traditions and customs, and cultural barriers.

²³² Marie Colvin, “Sunni Sheiks Turn their Sights from US Forces to Al-Qaeda,” *The Sunday Times*, (9 September 2007), <<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article2414588.ece>> [Accessed 23 November 2007].

²³³ Kilcullen, “Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt.”

²³⁴ Ibid.

4. War Economy and Black Market

Some tribal leaders acknowledged that the split started over women, however women weren't the only issue. "For years the tribes treated the terrorists as 'useful idiots', while AQI in turn exploited them for cover and support."²³⁵ However, al Qaeda "had upset members of the tribes by disturbing their control over the black market and infringing on their territory."²³⁶ According to General David Petraeus, "The sheikhs in Anbar province 'all have a truck company, they all have a construction company and they all have an import-export business.'" The al Anbar Sunni tribes have traditionally been responsible for smuggling across the Syrian border, even under Saddam Hussein. Even under the U.S. occupation, the tribes still run smuggling, import/export and construction businesses which AQI shut down, took over, or disrupted through violent disturbances that were "bad for business."²³⁷

Many Sunni sheiks contributed "in Iraq's conflict economy" and transformed themselves, "for all practical purposes, into local warlords." The leader of the Anbar Awakening, Sheikh 'Abd al-Sattar, had "led a band of highwaymen who operated near Ramadi and worked as a facilitator for AQI on the side, providing its operatives with cars, safe houses, and local guides." However, AQI *jihadis* he was helping "started working as highwaymen too - encroaching on his 'turf,' cutting into his profits, and then killing his father and several brothers - the relationship soured, prompting the sheikh to turn on AQI and to ally himself with coalition forces."²³⁸

5. Large Scale Violence against Sunni Civilians

The "tribal identities" offers "strong incentives for people to seek refuge ... as protection against pervasive violence and economic insecurity, and for sheikhs and

²³⁵ Kilcullen, "Anatomy of a Tribal Revolt."

²³⁶ Carter Malkasian, "A Thin Blue Line in the Sand," 55.

²³⁷ Eisenstadt, "Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lesson Learned," 25.

²³⁸ Ibid.

tribesmen to hang together for purposes of survival.”²³⁹ The Sunni population abandoned the insurgency and stopped giving support to *jihadis* because “they perceived insurgent violence as pointless in the face of a determined government [Iraqi] or occupying power [United States].”²⁴⁰

Atrocities that *jihadis* from al Qaeda had committed against the Sunni tribe Dulaimi completely changed the attitude towards the organization. *Jihadis*, which killed a tribal sheik’s father, “kidnapped his cousin, burned his home to the ground and alienated many of his fellow tribesmen by imposing a draconian version of Islamic law that proscribed smoking and required woman to shroud themselves in veils.”²⁴¹

In contradistinction to popular belief that “radical Islamic groups are irrational, crazy, or deviant,” Wiktorowicz argues that these “groups frequently follow a particular dynamic that mirrors the rational calculus of other non-Islamic social movement actors who have used violence as part of their repertoire of arguments.”²⁴² Acts of ridiculous violence and reckless killings perpetrated later on Sunnis by *jihadis* from al Qaeda in Iraq can be understood as part of a rational strategy aiming to punish and deter Sunni civilian defection under specific constraints and undermine “the signs of improvement in security situation” in al Anbar province.²⁴³ Losing support, AQI hit harder and in a more brutal manner. Sunni civilians that withdrew their support from the AQI and organized opposition against it were being viewed as apostates, according to the narrow definition used in Islamist doctrine. This includes the families of former AQI’s allies in the insurgency that had left the fight, joined tribal militias or local police, or surrendered to the regime. All of these people have become the enemies of AQI fighters, from the youngest of their children to the oldest of their elderly.

²³⁹ Eisenstadt, “Iraq: Tribal Engagement Lesson Learned,” 22.

²⁴⁰ Malkasian, “Signaling Resolve,” 423.

²⁴¹ Michael R. Gordon, “The Former-Insurgent Counterinsurgency,” *The New York Times*, September 2007, 2.

²⁴² Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Theory Approach*. 20.

²⁴³ Alissa J. Rubin, “Sunni Insurgents in New Campaign to Kill Officials,” *The New York Times*, (26 September 2007).

The expanding violence of al Qaeda against Sunni civilians led to greater defections to the regime, principally in the form of tribal, anti-insurgent militias. The so-called awakening of Al-Anbar “came in reaction to some erroneous practices by those who were regarded as jihadist.” They were targeting civilians and “destroyed infrastructure, killed children, displace families, and forced people out of their homes.”²⁴⁴ This response further enraged AQI militants and led them to take revenge, even against those who at one point had offered moral, financial, and physical support.

As the war in Iraq continued, Sunni who were initially sympathetic to the AQI’s cause could no longer endure the material costs of the *jihadis’* insurgency. Many stopped giving support; others turned against the movement. After a few years of sheltering the movement, both willingly or because of intimidation, some residents in and around Islamist strongholds agreed to form the Anbar Awakening and organized armed tribal militias.

6. A Revolt Spreads Out: Tribal Militias Emerge

Since summer 2007, a revolt against al Qaida’s methods spread out through the Sunnis dominated areas in Iraq. “In Falluja, a set of local tribes, civic leaders, and imams supported the creation of a police force of 1,200 following the clearing of the city at the end of 2004.” “In Al Qa’im, a city on the Syrian border, the powerful Albu Mahal tribe formed the majority of the local security forces, which number over 2,000. AQI had upset members of the tribe by disturbing their control over the black market and infringing on their territory in 2005.” Other Sunni provinces also started openly fighting AQI “directly or as part of the local forces.” “In Mosul, the Iraqi government granted the Jabburi tribe influence over the police forces in order to counter AQI.”²⁴⁵

Formed in 2006, an armed group of Sunni tribal elements, the Anbar Revenge Brigade, started actively fighting “al Qaeda’s top members operating in Iraq.” It arrested many al Qaeda and foreign terrorists and carried out the killings of al Qaeda elements

²⁴⁴ “Al-Arabiyah TV Interviews Head of AL-Anbar Salvation Council, Insurgency Key Figures,” Dubai Al-Arabiyah Television, Open Source Center (4 May 2007).

²⁴⁵ Carter Malkasian, “A Thin Blue Line in the Sand,” 55.

“avenging the death of the sons … of Ramadi city.” “Groups like Anbar Revenge Brigade have come to conclusion that the best way to reduce the coalition troop presence in their home regions is to flush out al Qaeda elements in their cities.” Sunni tribal and religious leaders who were targeted by al Qaeda further polarized tribes in al Anbar against *jihadis*.²⁴⁶

The Anbar Revenge Brigade, the Baquba Guardians and similar “armed groups made up of tribal members that assist securing al Anbar in conjunction with Iraqi security services,” were not “a formal part of Iraq’s security structure.” These groups were created with the desire of “taking revenge against al-Qaeda,” and with purpose of “improving the security situation in the restive province.” The assassination of senior tribal members by al Qaeda prompted tribal leaders to rise up against the Islamist extremists. “The Anbar Revenge Brigade was one many Sunni groups that “promised to stop all forms of cooperation with al Qaeda and form ‘The People’s Cells’ to oversee security.”²⁴⁷

In Baghdad, the revolt against AQI “was based on informal district power structures that evolved through the intense period of sectarian cleansing that so damaged the city and its people in 2006,” however, “clan connections, kinship links and the alliances they fostered” played an important role. In several Bagdad districts local communities “formed the neighborhood watch organizations, established access controls to prevent people from outside the district coming in without proper authorization and driven out terrorist cells.”²⁴⁸

The emergence of local Sunni tribal militias and implementation of these militias into Sunni police units (with greater authority) created “islands of stability and significantly [constrained] AQI’s influence in long Iraqi civil War.” Local Sunni police units closely connected to the Sunni community, “proved to be remarkably more effective in countering foreign [AQI] terrorists and keeping some semblance of law and order.” In response “for stepping against al Qaeda and backing the police, the Iraqi

²⁴⁶ Lydia Khalil, “Anbar Revenge Brigade Makes Progress in the Fight Against al Qaeda,” *Terrorism Focus, The Jamestown Foundation*, Vol. III, Issue 12 (28 March 2006), 1.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 2.

²⁴⁸ David Kilcullen, “Anatomy of Tribal Revolt.”

government gave local Sunni leaders greater military, economic, and political power.” It was “a necessary step in inducing Sunni leaders to support the police, and it enabled those leaders to get more members of their community to join the police and stand against AQI.”²⁴⁹

7. Sunni Insurgents Groups Stand Against AQI

In November 2007, two of the Iraqi resistance groups, the Iraqi Jihad Union and a Hamas in Iraq issued a statement accusing al Qaeda in Iraq of brutally killing woman and children, as well as “their fighters and commanders,” and mutilating their bodies. “They dug up their bodies from the graves, further mutilated them, beheaded them, and showed them off from their vehicles. … They committed all of these acts despite the fact that these brothers were faithful to their religion …”

In a similar statement, another insurgent group, Hamas in Iraq, complained that “The general public suffered a great deal because of [al Qaeda fighters’] actions.” In addition, they blamed AQI that “Every day they witnessed heads or headless bodies lying in the streets. Each one of these victims had been accused of a so-called ‘crime’ prohibited by al Qaeda *fatwahs*. The al Qaeda network, has actually made people here think that the occupation forces are merciful and humane by comparison.”²⁵⁰

The Islamic Army, a major Sunni insurgent group also turned against al-Qaeda in Iraq because the group in its later attempt “was killing the insurgents and other Iraqis who opposes its agenda.” The Islamic Army argued that nobody gave the right to al Qaeda to kill Iraqi civilians and more importantly, “All the al-Qaida attacks against the Iraqis have affected negatively the performance of the insurgents’ attacks on the U.S.

²⁴⁹ Carter Malkasian, “A Thin Blue Line in the Sand,” 49-55.

²⁵⁰ “Insurgent Groups Condemn Al-Qaida,” Presidio of Monterey Antiterrorism Newsletter (13 November 2007), 3. <<http://pomnet.monterey.army.mil>> [Accessed 27 November 2007].

forces ...”²⁵¹ Some Sunni insurgent groups noticed that “their association with al-Qa’ida in Iraq was ‘tainting their image as a nationalist resistance force.’”²⁵²

The insurgent’s demands to the leaders of the al Qaeda network, “to rethink their bitter journey in Iraq,” to ask themselves “why all the jihadi factions, and the people [of Iraq] are standing against them,” as well as “to be more concerned with upholding justice and obeying Allah instead of blindly obeying their organization” did not change AQI’s terrorist behavior.

However, all the statements issued by main insurgents groups, “hard-core jihadi groups and former al Qaeda allies,” with quite similar complaints, suggested very significant developments that the “‘tide is turning’ against al Qaeda in Iraq.” The groups accused al Qaeda of “brutally attacking and killing their members - attacking and killing anyone who does not do their order.” Indiscriminately targeting and killing other Muslims, “al Qaeda in Iraq is failing in its effort to position itself as the sole vanguard of Muslims.”²⁵³

However, “al Qaeda in Iraq is far from defeated and still has the means to continue its attacks in Iraq,” “the public criticism of al Qaeda in Iraq by other insurgent groups is a positive turn in the Iraq war, and a huge opportunity the U.S. should exploit.”²⁵⁴ “The combination of continuing hostility from some elements of the Sunni population and leadership losses...made the environment hostile to a degree beyond which AQI can successfully adapt. ... Its [AQI’s] role in the insurgency should decline over time.”²⁵⁵ Following “losing its largest fighting trench that sheltered its elements in al Anbar Province,” al Qaeda in Iraq “is facing a difficult situation that might push it into

251 “Iraq Sunnis Seem to Turn Their Gun at al-Qaida,” People’s Daily Online, (13 November 2007), <<http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90854/6301289.html>> [Accessed 28 November 2007].

252 Anthony H. Cordesman, “Success or Failure? Iraq’s Insurgency and Civil Violence and US Strategy: Developments through June 2007,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy, (9 July 2007), 80.

253 “Insurgent Groups Condemn Al-Qaida,” 3.

254 Ibid., 3.

255 Jeffrey White, “An Adaptive Insurgency: Confronting Adversary Networks in Iraq,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, Policy Focus, No. 58 (September 2006), 8.

collapse.” Sunni insurgent factions that “started to wage guerilla warfare” against AQI “believe they can crush the organization in Iraq completely.”²⁵⁶

E. CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the implications of al Qaeda’s use of indiscriminate, large scale violence against Iraqi civilians and its impact on insurgency in the ongoing war in Iraq. This analysis has identified several relevant factors regarding the genesis of violence and interactions between the most violent insurgent group in Iraq, al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and the civilian population that suffered from its attacks. It specifically considered the mechanism of the acts of ridiculous violence that led to rebellion against its perpetrators.

The first section of the chapter presented the Islamist extremist group, al Qaeda in the Land of Two Rivers, in context of the ongoing insurgency in Iraq. More specifically it examined the genesis, methods and levels of violence against civilians. The second section analyzed how AQI has conducted violent actions in order to reach its goal and demobilize the threat. The third section answered the question that indiscriminate, large scale violence against civilians led to civilian mobilization. Or, survival by way of creating tribal, armed militias that protected local communities from Islamist *jihadis*’ hostilities. It also emphasized the Sunni tribal system as the center of gravity through which the successful rebellion against the ruthless methods of al Qaeda was made possible. These events provide opportunity for the United States and the Iraqi Government to exploit it in pursuing the end of the war.

²⁵⁶ “Iraq’s Sunni Armed Groups Reportedly Planning Alliance Against Al-Qa’ida,” London Al – Hayah, Open Source Center (11 April 2007).

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IV. CONCLUSION

By studying the examples of Islamist indiscriminate, large scale violence in the civil war in Algeria and ongoing war in Iraq, this research concluded that insurgent groups resorting to use violence against civilians was part of a deliberate strategy, aiming to combat regime forces and to shape civilian behavior. This is contrary to popular views that Islamist violence is an example of irrational, deadly madness motivated by a radical religious ideology. There is logic behind it. The Islamist terrorists in both cases shifted their main efforts from attacking regimes' military and security forces to civilian targets because they were more vulnerable and had far more political impact. By indiscriminately attacking civilians, the GIA, as well as the AQI, committed crimes against innocent people, lost popular support and were accused even by radical Muslims of violation of the genuine concept of jihad and deviation from its correct path. In both cases, the dynamics of the war exaggerated the level of insecurity, which in turn produced a reaction in the form of self-defense groups or tribal militias.

The ruthless acts of violence and reckless massacres perpetrated by the Armed Islamic Group in Algeria in the 1990s were a part of a rational strategy aiming to control the civilian population by coercion and mobilize it against the unpopular regime, and most importantly to punish and deter civilian defection toward the incumbents. The GIA's massive and ruthless violence performed a communicative function with a clear deterrent aspect and it was used at both tactical and strategic levels. Even though large scale massacres perpetrated by the Armed Islamist Group in their strongholds against people who previously supported them were rational from the GIA perspective, people perceived their violence as indiscriminate, being unsure what to expect from Islamist insurgents. Since they recognized that Islamist *jihadis* might abuse them and that compliance did not guarantee them security, they started to resist. Algerians perceived the GIA's violence as deeply unfair and excessive. Algerian people wanted to carry on with their lives instead of taking sides in the conflict. This senseless violence caused emotional reactions, anger and desire for revenge. The GIA's violence generated incentives for collaboration with the regime instead of deterring it. Unable to stop defection in their

ranks, the GIA expanded its violence to the whole population, who did not support them actively. This tactic, however, backfired. The expanding indiscriminate and brutal violence against civilians made people exhausted of the war, alienated *jihadis* from the local population, generated resistance and finally, led to greater defection to the regime by way of creating self-defending, anti-insurgent militias to protect local communities.

The GIA atrocities caused the breakdown in the organization and, what is more, turned popular support dramatically against the whole Islamic movement in Algeria. Thus the pragmatists in the Islamic Salvation Front, unable to limit the scale of the violence and save the image of jihad, recognized that they could no longer reach their objective of political inclusion through the use of violence. And so they agreed to a ceasefire and joined the political process. The risk of widespread violence followed by the series of massacres in 1997 produced “conditions for reconciliation within the army and the AIS-FIS.”²⁵⁷

Similar to the Algerian case, al Qaeda in Iraq increasingly resorted to massive, indiscriminate violence against noncombatants to reach their goal of creating an Islamic caliphate in Mesopotamia. To maintain control over the population, gain popular support and intimidate opponents, and create a constant climate of violence and chaos, AQI’s takfiris used indiscriminate terror. What significantly distinguishes AQI’s tactic from that of the GIA’s massive massacres is the large scale use of dramatic and horrifying suicide missions.

Indiscriminate and large scale violence against civilian Iraqis, both Shia and Sunni, however, alienated the majority of the Iraqi population, and, most importantly, caused opposition to the AQI’s tactics among Sunni Iraqis, as well as the foreign support base. Sunni tribes in Iraq tired of al Qaeda atrocities and intimidations against Sunni civilians who were supporting Islamist fighters turned against the *jihadis*; and started to cooperate with United States forces and Iraqi Army. They formed the Al Anbar Salvation Council and with local tribal militias, they began to combat the threat from al Qaeda and to expel the extremists from their territories. By waging a campaign of terror against Iraqi

²⁵⁷ Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, 247.

civilians, al Qaeda in Iraq made a strategic mistake and alienated itself from the local Sunni population. Brutal mass killings were intended to intimidate Sunnis into at least accepting to al Qaeda's presence, if not supporting al Qaeda at all. Al Qaeda in Iraq hoped that if *jihadis* would murder random groups of women and children, the tribes would fall back in line. It failed to work and instead, as the car bombs went off, al Qaeda lost popular support for its jihad. The local Sunni security forces protecting their own communities, cooperating with United States forces and Iraqi Army, "reassures Sunni leaders that they will not be permanently victimized in a future Iraq," and "make such leaders more willing to engage in the political process." The Sunni tribal militias, that do not attack Shia neighbors, also undercut AQI's calls for sectarian violence, thus marginalizing extremists from both sides.²⁵⁸

The spontaneous creation of self-defense militias to protect their communities against radical Islamist insurgents, tolerated and in some cases controlled by regime security forces, is a classic anti-guerilla model of warfare. This model was implemented during the Algerian War of Independence against FLN guerrillas, used by the apartheid regime in South Africa and in Peru in the struggle against the terrorist organization Shining Path. This model also occurred and was very successful in combating Islamist guerrillas from the GIA in the Algerian Civil War and brought unexpected improvement of security in the most violent and hostile province in Iraq – al Anbar. "Pursuing a grassroots Iraqization in which greater effort is placed on developing local Sunni police forces ... could allow the areas that enjoy relatively restricted insurgent activity to be expanded, thereby constraining AQI's influence. In contrast to the Iraqi Army, local Sunni forces can control territory, collect intelligence, and cripple AQI."²⁵⁹

Fishman thinks that "extremist ideology, that relishes violence and embraces criticism as an indicator of ideological correctness is always going to alienate more people than it attracts." Such a tendency "played out as Iraq's tribal Sunnis increasingly rejected Zarqawi" and al Qaeda *jihadis*.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ David Kilcullen, "Anatomy of Tribal Revolt."

²⁵⁹ Carter Malkasian, "A Thin Blue Line in the Sand," 57.

²⁶⁰ Fishman, "After Zarqawi," 22.

Abrahms argues that *Jihadis* from AQI, so optimistic about usefulness of violence for achieving their goals, didn't make any perceptible progress in realizing theirs objectives. Al Qaeda in Iraq, similarly to other terrorists groups, "whose attacks on civilian targets outnumbered attacks on military targets systematically failed to achieve their policy objective." It did not force U.S. occupation forces to leave Iraq and did not win control over a piece of territory for the purpose of creating an Islamic state, run by *Sharia*, for future al Qaeda jihad. Attacking civilians, especially Sunni Muslim who provided support and sustenance, was not an effective strategy to attain AQI's policy goals. Al Qaeda failed in Iraq because it miscommunicated its policy goals. Sunni viewed the deaths of their fellow tribe members and "the resulting turmoil as a proof" that *jihadis* wanted "to destroy their societies" and subjugate them. Finally, the recent polls suggest that "In most majority-Muslim countries ... support for suicide bombing and other acts of violence in defense of Islam has declined significantly."²⁶¹

By indiscriminately attacking civilians with senseless violence, the Armed Islamic Group and al Qaeda in Iraq separated itself from the population and lost local support. Also, as a result, the lost freedom of movement and safe sanctuaries to hide, and became more exposed on regime forces attacks. The strategy of attacking civilians in both cases proved to be ineffective and led these Islamist groups to failure.

²⁶¹ Abrahms, "Why Terrorism does not Work,"43-77.

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